





## Libya reports progress in Lockerbie negotiations

TUNIS (R) — Libya said on Wednesday that talks with South African and Saudi envoys had allowed progress to be made towards resolving the Lockerbie affair and that consultations were continuing to overcome remaining obstacles.

The official Libyan news agency JANA, monitored in Tunis, said that Jakes Gerwel and Prince Bandar Ben Sultan who met Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi on Tuesday in Libya had held "important and expanded talks on the so-called Lockerbie issue."

"Important practical steps had been reached during these talks towards a solu-

tion to the issue and it had been confirmed that all parties had good intentions toward each other in order to find a solution through cooperation between these parties," the agency quoted a Libyan Foreign Affairs Ministry as saying.

"Consultations and efforts are still continuing in order to overcome remaining obstacles," it added. It did not elaborate.

Gerwel, Mandela's chief of staff, and Prince Bandar, the Saudi envoy to Washington, had flown together to Tripoli.

JANA said the two envoys had handed Qadhafi letters from South African President Nelson Mandela

and Saudi King Fahd respectively in an attempt to persuade him to extradite two Libyan suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. A total of 270 people died in the disaster.

Libya last year agreed the pair should go on trial in a neutral country but demanded additional guarantees before handing them over.

The South African and Saudi envoys were on a "clarification" mission to facilitate a trial in the Netherlands by a Scottish court and under Scottish law as the United States and Britain have demanded.

## France proposes end to Iraq oil embargo

(Continued from page 1)

Regarding the control of Iraqi oil revenues, the French proposals do not provide for the continuation of an escrow account which under an oil-for-food scheme enables the United Nations to control Iraqi funds.

But Iraq and oil purchasers would be required to notify the United Nations of contracts.

Arms imports would continue to be scrutinised, and the import of equipment that could be used to reconstitute weapons of mass destruction systems would remain banned.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday that the French ideas contained "positive" elements, but the United States insists on disarmament before lifting the Iraqi embargo.

British Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock also raised the issue of turning the page on Iraqi disarmament, to concentrate on long-term monitoring, during the closed-door council discussions.

Greenstock said that the council needed to relate the French proposals "to the corpus of resolutions which we already have," diplomats said.

Meanwhile, Iraq, in an apparent policy shift, said it would prefer a balanced dialogue to break the impasse in its military confrontation with the United States and Britain.

"Iraq sees a need for a balanced dialogue based on

good intentions under the umbrella of the Arab Nation... to find practical solutions to the situations," a spokesman said after President Saddam Hussein met top aides late on Tuesday.

At the same time, two groups of Arab states said they would hold further talks in the next few days on relations with Baghdad, ahead of an Arab League foreign ministers meeting on Iraq on Jan. 24.

Some Arab states have been alarmed by Iraq's verbal attacks on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and by the call from Iraqi parliamentarians for Baghdad to scrap recognition of U.N. resolutions adopted after the 1991 Gulf War, including one recognising Kuwait.

Official Iraqi newspapers on Wednesday quoted the spokesman as saying after Tuesday's high-level meeting that "if solutions are desired in a serious manner that serve the Arab Nation's interest, they should be based on pan-Arab security."

Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz were among those present at the meeting with Saddam.

The statement appeared to tone down Iraq's rhetoric against some Arab states, but the spokesman still called for Arabs to condemn supporters of last month's U.S. and British attacks on Iraq.

He said the right solution to the crisis should "consider any aggression from a foreign faction upon any Arab country as an aggression on the Arab Nation as a whole."

## Iran denies ties with Russian institutes

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran on Wednesday denied U.S. charges that it worked with three Russian research institutes to develop nuclear and missile technology.

"These accusations are not new and Iranian and Russian authorities have already denied them," the Iranian embassy in Moscow said in a statement, quoted by the official Iranian news agency IRNA.

The United States announced Tuesday it would slap sanctions on three Russian research institutes for providing missile and nuclear assistance to Iran.

The Moscow Aviation Institute, Medvedev University and the Scientific Research and Design Institute of Power Technology will suffer "economic penalties," said U.S. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger.

"Iran has no knowledge of the two institutes mentioned and it has just a few students studying law, languages and humanities subjects at the Moscow university," the embassy said.

"Iran has had no other relations or cooperation with the Moscow university," it said.

Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov slammed the U.S. move on Wednesday as "counterproductive for Russian-American relations."



A Palestinian child wearing handcuffs carries a picture of his incarcerated father Wednesday during a demonstration in Gaza City to demand the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Some 300 children demanded that Israel adhere to its commitments under the Wye River peace accords signed with the Palestinians' last month (AFP photo)

## Palestinian villagers stop settler bulldozers

QALQILYA (AFP) — Dozens of Palestinians from two villages in the north of the West Bank blocked Israeli settlers Wednesday from seizing land to expand nearby Jewish enclaves.

Villagers from Kafr Salaf and Azzun intervened to stop bulldozers guarded by armed settlers from levelling land and uprooting trees in an operation to appropriate several hundred hectares of land near the villages, witnesses said.

The settlers were from the communities of Ginnot Shomron, Emmanuel and Kiryat Shomron, the witnesses said.

They said an officer from the Israeli military liaison arrived on the scene and told the settlers that there was no official permission to confiscate the land, which falls in Area C of the West Bank where Israel has full control over civilian and military matters.

Three months ago the Israeli authorities ruled that the area in question was common land not owned by any one individual, but local Palestinians were given time to appeal the decision.

The Palestinians objected to the ruling and produced ownership documents but the

Israeli court has yet to announce a verdict on the claim.

At the end of 1998, Israeli settlers remained in control of six sites appropriated outside existing settlements in the West Bank, according to the Bethlehem-based Applied Research Institute.

Settlers grabbed more than a dozen plots of land after Israel's Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon urged them "to grab as many hills as possible" in the wake of the U.S.-brokered Wye River land-for-peace agreement signed in October.

## PNA legislature gives Arafat two weeks on detainees cases

RAMALLAH (AP) — Palestinian lawmakers, furious that some 450 people are being held without trial for political opposition, gave Yasser Arafat's government two weeks Wednesday to either press charges or release the detainees.

In a stormy four-hour session at the Palestinian Legislative Council, lawmakers also demanded an end to political arrests and said all such prisoners should be released immediately.

Since the Palestinian National Authority was established in 1994, its security forces have arrested thousands of Palestinians accused of political or militant activity but only 11 have been charged and successfully prosecuted, according to legislator Hassan Khreishe.

Some lawmakers Wednesday suggested a no-confidence motion against Justice Minister Freih Abu Medein but later backed down after reassurances that Arafat would release some prisoners next week as a goodwill gesture at the end of the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan.

The 88-member legislative council enacts laws for the young Palestinian autonomy but more often is at loggerheads with Arafat and his cabinet for not implementing their legislation or upholding existing law.

Outside the Palestinian legislature, scores of veiled Arab women chanting "Justice Minister, where is the justice?"

"We want an end to the

issue of political detention," said 39-year-old Maysar Jaber whose husband Yusef was rounded up by Palestinian security agents after Islamists carried out a September suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

"This is the third holiday we will spend without him," Jaber said. "The only thing they did was believe in a political line that is different from the Authority." The issue of prisoners is one of the most emotionally charged in Palestinian society. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been jailed by Israel during nearly 30 years of military occupation, touching just about every Palestinian family.

Palestinians hoped that such arrests would end when their lives fell under Palestinian rule. But Arafat has also carried out large-scale arrests of suspected Islamists, including Hamas members often in response to attacks on Israelis.

The United States and Israel have pressured Arafat to continuously crackdown on militants, something Arafat agreed to do in Mideast peace accords.

Khreishe said the legislature as well as the government is to be blamed for the continued arrests.

"For three years we have pursued this issue and we have failed to win their release just as the Palestinian negotiators have failed to win the release of prisoners in Israeli jails," Khreishe said.

## 'Election last chance for peace

WASHINGTON (R) — Three women from Jerusalem — one Muslim, one Jewish and one Christian — on Tuesday warned that May 17 national elections in Israel could represent the region's last chance for peace.

Michal Shohat, a member of Israel's left-wing opposition Meretz Party and a candidate for the Knesset, said the outcome of the May elections would be critical in deciding the fate of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

"This election is going to be our last chance as Israeli citizens for peace," Shohat told U.S. peace activists in Washington on Tuesday.

The three women were travelling across the United States on a tour organised by Part-

ners for Peace, a U.S.-based peace group, and other organisations, with talks scheduled at churches, synagogues and universities from New York to Los Angeles.

Nahla Asali, a Muslim Palestinian who teaches at Bir Zeit University, said she feared the region would "sink into an inferno of suffering" if hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party, was reelected, and urged Israeli citizens to "choose peace, not bullets."

Fatin Muhawi, a Christian Palestinian, said a majority of Israelis and Palestinians supported peace and wanted decades of violence between the two sides to end.

### JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

#### Thursday Programmes

15:10 ..... Cartoon — Superman  
15:30 ..... Science fiction — Space Precinct

16:30 ..... (Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)  
17:00 ..... Drama — Sparks  
18:15 ..... Omar Ben Abdul Aziz

19:00 ..... Le Journal  
19:15 ..... Words of Wisdom  
19:30 ..... News Headlines

19:35 ..... Comedy — Family Matters  
20:00 ..... A Journey Across the Land of Islam

20:30 ..... Drama — Dr. Quinn the Medicine Woman

21:10 ..... Oprah Winfrey Show  
22:00 ..... News in English  
22:30 ..... Feature film — "Till There Was You"

23:59 ..... Comedy — Dudley

00:30 ..... End of T.X.

#### Friday Programmes

15:10 ..... Animated Classics  
15:30 ..... Treasure Hunt

16:30 ..... (Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)  
17:00 ..... The Simpsons

18:15 ..... Omar Ben Abdul Aziz  
19:00 ..... Le Journal

19:15 ..... Words of Wisdom  
19:30 ..... News Headlines

19:35 ..... Comedy — The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

20:00 ..... Islamic Heritage and Art  
20:30 ..... Drama — "Babylon - 5"

21:15 ..... Doc. — Full Circle  
22:00 ..... News in English

22:30 ..... Drama — The X-Files  
23:10 ..... Feature film — "The Ernest Green Story"

23:59 ..... End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:56 ..... Fajr

## JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

05:11 ..... (Sunrise) Duha

11:45 ..... Dhuhur

14:33 ..... 'Asr

16:56 ..... Maghreb

18:18 ..... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church

Sweifish Tel. 5920740

Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4634590

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church Tel. 4634544

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771757

Amman International Church Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweifish Tel. 5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Moderate weather conditions will prevail during the day becoming cool at night.

Clouds will appear at different altitudes and winds southeasterly to southwesterly moderate.

In Aqaba it will be warm, winds northerly moderate, and sea calm.

Amman ..... 05/17

Aqaba ..... 09/24

Jerash ..... 03/18

Desert ..... 03/18

Jordan Valley ..... 10/24

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 17, Aqaba 22

Humidity readings: Amman

37 per cent, Aqaba 31 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun ..... 04/13

Jerash ..... 06/18

Um Qays ..... 06/16

Madaba ..... 05/16

Petra ..... 05/16

Dead Sea ..... 11/24

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Yusef Rashid ..... 4875792

Dr. Jun'a Abu Dhiab ..... 475848

Dr. Ahmad Mann'a ..... 5359413

Dr. Walid Al Masri ..... 5675485

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy ..... 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy ..... 5537004

Rakhi Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:

Dr. Issam Al Salih ..... 021246858

Fou'ad Pharmacy ..... 021275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid Halaseh ..... 09982799

Palestine Pharmacy ..... 09983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre ..... 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue ..... 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency ..... 109

Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777

Fire Brigade ..... 4617101

Blood Bank ..... 4775121

Highway Police ..... 5343402

Traffic office ..... 4896390

Public Security Dept. .... 4630321

Hotel Complaints ..... 5605800

Price Complaints ..... 5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints 4897487

Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) ..... 121

Overseas Calls ..... 0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs ..... 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs ..... 5661101

Jordan Television ..... 4773111

Radio Jordan ..... 4774111

Water Authority ..... 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co. .... 4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery ..... 5921199

The Islamic, Abdli ..... 5666131/7

Hussein Medical Centre 5856856

Luzraia ..... 4630195

Khalidi Maternity ..... 4644281/6

Akileh Maternity ..... 4642411/2

Jabal Amman Maternity ..... 4642362

Malhas, J. Amman ..... 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani ..... 5607071

Shmeisani Hospital ..... 5607431

Jordan Hospital ..... 5607530

University Hospital ..... 5353444

Al-Muhsar Hospital 5667277/9

Al-Ahli, Abdli ..... 5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3

Al-Bashir ..... 4775111/26

Army, Marka ..... 4891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital ..... 5157100

Arnal Hospital ..... 5607155

Al Ansal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital ..... 09983323

Zarqa National Hospital 09990560

Ibn Sina Hospital ..... 09986731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital ..... 09990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital 021275555

Roman Catholic Hospital 021272275

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital ..... 0217101372, 0217103101

Rosary Sisters Hospital ..... 0217102831, 0217102011

Speciality Hospital ..... 0217103100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital 032014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. 44153200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone



## American Muslim women challenge 'outdated' ideas, educate Americans against stereotypes

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A Muslim scholar said Wednesday that women in the world still suffer from thinking predominant during jahilia (pre-Islamic era), when men believed women were their property, stressing that the problem lies with families' failure to teach their children proper morals.

"The concept of women being the owners and guardians of their own morality is still rejected in the U.S. and worldwide," said Sharifa Khatib, founder and vice-president of the North American Council for Muslim Women.

"If women are taught the right values and true faith by their families they will behave morally anywhere in the world, without anyone having to worry about their morals," Khatib, who lectured on "Violence Against Women in the American Community and the Role of the Arab American Muslims in Combating It" at the Sisterhood Is Global Institute headquarters in Jabal Weibdeh.

Established in 1992 by 150 multi-ethnic women as an independent, continent-wide organisation, the

council concentrates on changing the stereotypical image of women and establishing a dialogue between all sectors of Muslim women while combating domestic violence in the U.S.

Although membership jumped to 450, Khatib said the creation of the council faced strong resistance from the community and Islamists.

"Many men and Islamists thought we had no business being an independent women's organisation, and it was very difficult for us to be accepted, especially by Islamists who thought that a man should be our president," she said.

"But we broke the stereotype and insisted on independence by emphasising the fact that we are Muslim women and we are proud to be so, but we want to be independent," she stated.

"In the end they got used to us and accepted us," she added.

One issue the council decided to drop before starting to accept membership, was the issue of hijab (woman's headscarf).

"We realised that talking about women's liberation would at first be confronted by the issue of hijab, and we decided that a piece of

cloth should not stop us, so we decided to put it aside," Khatib, who is a well-known speaker on gender equity and women's rights, said.

Another sensitive point the council had to deal with was teaching women that they are not the properties of their male guardians and that "they are never obliged by Islam to serve men."

"We help women to be empowered by their thinking and help them gain self-confidence and explain to them that they are independent human beings and their direct relationship should be with God. He is the only one who 'owns' their future," she said.

The council is also helping women in the U.S. tie the knot in accordance with Islam, by guiding them to demand equality and shared responsibilities with their husbands in their marriage contracts.

"At the same time we emphasise the idea that we want to preserve the family, not destroy it," she emphasised.

She pointed to a 1993 survey conducted by the council on violence against women in the U.S., the outcome of which showed that "ten per cent of all women surveyed had been subject

to incidents of violence, ranging from verbal, psychological, physical, sexual violence incidents and few cases of honour crimes."

"Our organisation has been deliberately and quietly working in the community on domestic issues, including violence against women and children," she told the gathering.

Khatib talked about the organisation's long-term plans to eliminate the stereotyping of Muslim women in the U.S. community.

Many Americans think that Muslim women do not have an independent mind, cannot think for themselves and are ignorant, she said.

"We try to change this image by participating in all public meetings and by building strong relationships with the press," she said.

Khatib, who is the guest of the United States Information Service at the American Embassy in Amman, said her future plans include conducting a second survey on domestic violence in the U.S.

She concluded by saying she also plans to run for the U.S. Senate "where I plan to protect women's rights."

## House committee recommends lifting Abbadi's immunity

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — The Lower House Legal Committee has recommended that Deputy Ahmad Oweidi Abbadi's immunity be lifted so that he can be questioned by the criminal prosecutor in connection with an alleged case of sexual assault, the committee's chairman said Wednesday.

But Deputy Ghaleb Zu'bi stressed that should the House accept the committee's recommendations, the lifting of immunity would only be partial.

He explained that, therefore, it cannot be used for the purpose of detention.

Committee members were reported to have been split on whether to lift Abbadi's immunity only partially to allow questioning, but not an indictment, to lift it completely, or to delay discussion of the matter till after Eid Al Fitr holidays.

But according to House regula-

tions, cases concerning the immunity of deputies are referred to the Legal Committee to review and issue recommendations to the House within a two-week period.

Zu'bi told the Jordan Times that the committee had asked the House General Secretariat to delay the review of the immunity case till after the holidays but said that the House's internal laws do not allow for an extension over the set two-week period which ended Tuesday night.

According to Arab dailies, Deputy Mahmoud Kharabshah, the committee rapporteur, said the sudden meeting came after the chairman received an unsigned memo from the House's General Secretariat to reconvene and issue recommendations.

"Six out of the seven members attending voted for the lifting of immunity, one voted against, and four were absent," said Zu'bi.

"While I was reading the recommendation, two other deputies showed up and signed their approval. Later on, another deputy also signed," Zu'bi added.

In all, nine deputies agreed to lift Abbadi's immunity. Only one, Deputy Mahmoud Kharabshah, opposed the decision. The only member of the committee not present was Deputy Mohammad Azadeh, who was in Saudi Arabia performing Umra.

Once the immunity is lifted, Abbadi will face two charges of sexual assault: "committing rape" and "damaging to marital bonds."

The Constitution states that senators and deputies shall not be subject to court prosecution while Parliament is in session unless an absolute majority of the Lower House finds enough evidence to allow prosecution.

Deliberations and voting on the issue are expected to take place in the first session after

Eid Al Fitr.

Abbadi has denied the allegations levelled against him, saying that they were fabricated by certain parties seeking revenge against him.

The husband of the woman who filed one of the sexual assault cases against the deputy has dropped charges. But the Legal Committee says the husband's decision to drop charges did not mean that the case is dropped at the Lower House.

Informed sources told the Jordan Times earlier that the woman who filed the case claimed that she had an affair with Abbadi and he promised to marry her.

Since the restoration of parliamentary life in 1989, the House has never lifted the immunity of any deputy and has since turned down two similar requests involving former deputies Yaqoub Qarrash and Jamal Khreishah during the 11th and 12th parliaments respectively.

## Automobile business skids after decision on customs

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The government's latest decision to halt customs exemptions promised to taxi owners who turned in their old vehicles to the Customs Department for free to receive the exemption has drawn sharp criticism from taxi owners as well as car dealerships, who have described the move as hasty and irresponsible.

"The sudden halt has confused the entire car dealership sector who have made arrangements in accordance with the market's expected demands," said Ziad Bustami, general manager of the Nissan dealership, which has sold hundreds of the car manufacturer's Sunny models to taxi and service owners.

The automobile trade has become more lucrative since the government exempted public service taxis from customs, a deal offered as an incentive to thousands of taxi and service owners to help the government upgrade public transport. Owners rushed to replace their ageing cars with new ones. But the govern-

ment's recent decision has turned the industry upside down.

"We have already ordered shipments of cars, which are on the way to the country. If the government does not change its mind very quickly, that will cause a great loss for us," Bustami told the Jordan Times.

Many taxi owners fear that the halt is only the beginning and the worst is yet to come.

"I am afraid that the government wants to reconsider its decision and charge us like it used to," said Mohammad Ali, of Al Sabal Taxi.

Under the existing arrangements, owners of taxis and service cars may surrender their old vehicles to the Customs Department to qualify for the customs exemption on replacement vehicles.

The government granted the exemption as part of a campaign by the Ministry of Transport to modernise cars on Amman roads and generally upgrade the public transport sector to accommodate an increase in foreign visitors after signing the peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Without an exemption, many owners would not be

able to afford the cost of renewing ageing vehicles, some of which have been prowling Amman highways and byways since 1955, because of the heavy tax imposed on new cars.

A 1200 cc-engine car imported for private use can cost as much as JD13,000. Under the current customs exemption, a taxi owner could buy the same car for JD7,000 after turning in his old car, without compensation, to the government.

Several thousand taxis were replaced after the government offered the exemption. The Customs Department in turn sells the old cars off, mostly as scrap.

This measure was a dramatic boost to the country's public transport sector, particularly in improving the quality of the taxis and service taxis on Jordan's roads, and in replacing the Kingdom's ageing fleet of trucks. The cabinet's four-year old decision was designated to end in 2000.

According to a Customs Department official, the department had to delay granting any new exemptions because it is preparing to issue

a new customs law. The law is expected to be enacted after Eid Al Fitr, said the official.

Minister of Finance Michael Manto said the sudden stop was caused by the cancellation of the customs law and has affected public sector companies, not just privately-owned companies.

The customs official said those who turned in their cars before the end of December 1998 will be treated in accordance with the former regulations and will be exempted from duty.

People who delivered their cars after the beginning of 1999 will have to be subjected to the new law, expected to be enacted soon.

Dealerships warned that any change to three-year-old decision would deal them losses ranging in the hundreds of thousands of dinars.

"They have to grant me the exemption, otherwise, I will literally speaking, be indebted to the bank for the rest of my life," said Ali who says he took a JD7,000 loan from the bank to buy his new car. "I will lose my life's savings and I will spend the rest of my life paying back my debt to the bank."

## Charity reaches out to Jordan's poor

By Suha Ma'ayeh

AMMAN — A U.S.-based relief foundation is joining hands with the government to help Jordan's growing poor, especially in rural and remote areas of the country, a foundation official said on Wednesday.

The Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development has embarked on a project to feed the fasting during Ramadan, along with the Ministry of Social Development and the help of Her Royal Highness Princess Basma, who is currently heading an annual charity campaign.

Majdi Da'ood, the foundation's representative, said a team of volunteers from the development ministry and Queen Alia Fund for Social Development began preparations before Ramadan and is now distributing food packages

in scores of impoverished villages.

The charitable organisation was created in 1989 in the American state of Texas to provide humanitarian aid through various programmes directed towards the poor and underprivileged. The organisation is also dedicated to finding practical solutions for those suffering the effects of poverty and unemployment through programmes in the areas of emergency relief, health care, social services, education and community development.

According to official figures, those struggling for their daily bread account for nearly 30 per cent of the country's 4.2 million population.

The government is under orders from His Majesty King Hussein to fight unemployment and poverty in a country where the gap between the rich and

poor is widening due to economic recession.

The government recently allocated JD773,000 to carry out a project to feed children in the primary state-run schools in poverty-stricken areas. It will start in the second scholastic semester.

The move is part of the government's approach to extend its social safety net to those worst hit by the ailing economy.

Poverty and malnutrition are on the rise. Studies indicated iodine and iron deficiency and malnutrition among school children will adversely affect their performance and motivation to learn, and expose them to diseases.

"Three thousand two hundred and fifty families have received food packages containing lentils, sugar, rice, cheese, soap and other items, worth \$80,000," said the Holy Land

Foundation representative.

"[Wednesday] we distributed sachets to 50 families in Um Al Basateen, near Amman. Nearly 40 women were widowed, left without support and they had children to feed," Da'ood said.

"In some of the houses that we visited, the refrigerators were empty," he stressed.

"There are plans to launch income generating projects in the country and we will commence after registering a regional office in Jordan which will help us continue our work," he said.

In 1998, the foundation distributed food packages worth \$100,000 during Ramadan and the 'Eid Al Adha (Sacrifice Feast). More than \$850,000 worth of new clothing also was distributed to the poor.

## Lebanon's diva returns to Amman stage after 16-year absence

By Susan Resheq



FAIROUZ: On stage Jan. 28-29 at APU

AMMAN — Sixteen years have passed since her last performance in Jordan, but Lebanese diva Fairouz will return to an Amman stage later this month for two concerts at Amman Private University.

The legendary singer will perform later this month in honour of the recovery of His Majesty King Hussein, who will return to the Kingdom on Tuesday and the opening of a multi-purpose sports and cultural centre at the Amman Private University.

The centre will be the "largest sports and cultural centre in the Middle East and North Africa," said Jamal Mar'i, the university's marketing manager.

But Fairouz enthusiasts will have to dig deep into their pockets to attend the event. Front row seats and other "first class" seats at the university's auditorium will come at a hefty JD100, second class at JD75 and "third class" seats will be a "mere" JD50. Organisers said there will be between 5,000 and 8,000 seats available.

Mar'i contends the tickets

are "not expensive."

"Many Arab singers have performed concerts in Jordan — Warden Al Jazeera and the Iraqi singer Qasim al Saher — and people bought their tickets for high prices."

"Fairouz is regarded as one of the greatest singers in the Arab World," he added, describing the rush for tickets as "high."

Osama Sharabati, a student at the Amman Private University said he splurged for a first class ticket at first chance. A chance to hear the Lebanese legend is not an everyday opportunity.

"The great singer Fairouz has not been here since her concert at Jerash 1982," he said.

Others report that a rare chance to see Fairouz will, unfortunately, pass them by.

Mahmoud Salem, another student at the university described tickets as "too expensive."

"I wish I could attend, but I cannot even buy a third class ticket at the concert," he said. The revenues of the concert will be divided between Al Faisali Sports Club, the concert organiser and the Amman Private University and Fairouz.

## Letter to the Editor

### Clarification

To the Editor:

In your Jan. 13, 1999 issue, you published a story on page 3 with the following headline: "Writer apologises to Swiss Ambassador."

The translation seems to be sheer fabrication, for the article (in Al Ra'i) carried no word of apology.

It seems that the translator is illiterate and the person writing the headline is a complexed sadist.

I have gone over the article and found no word of apology, but words of thanks to the [Swiss] Ambassador and admiration for Switzerland.

I demand in the best journalist tradition to have those words published in the same page and place as this mutilated story was published.

— Raja Elissa Amman

## What's Going On

FILM

"Conspiracy Theory" at Books/Café, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 10:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650457).

SPECIAL RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Special Christian and Muslim religious services will be conducted at different houses of worship to give thanks for His Majesty King Hussein's recovery and imminent return to Jordan. On Thursday, Jan. 14, Jordanian Muslim women will hold special afternoon prayers at the various mosques in the Kingdom. On Saturday, Jan. 16, the Roman Catholic Bishop Salim Al Sayegh will lead prayers at St. John de La Salle Church. Sharifa Zein Bint Nassar requested that prayers be organised through the Women's Affairs Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

PLAY

"Al Bab Al 'Ali" by Al Dhiffah Group — Beit Al Karmeh (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

EXHIBITION

Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewellery at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Saqra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 5699141/2).

The Warm Winter — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1. The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2, until Jan. 28.

## Senators deny deliberately withholding Illicit Profit Law

By Francesca Ciriadi

AMMAN — Senators have denied recent allegations by deputies that the Upper House has deliberately withheld in its drawers an anti-corruption draft law approved by the Lower House in 1992 and passed on to the Senate.

The draft, officially named "Law Against Illicit Profit," required that officials at various levels, including ministers, deputies, and senators, submit a total assessment of their assets and properties upon appointment or election to their post.

Deputies intended that conflicts of interests, and cases in which officials or lawmakers may take advantage of their mandate to pursue their own business interests could be more easily revealed.

The draft also aimed at providing a tool to evaluate deputies and officials' illicit gains during their term in office, by comparing the assets declared at the beginning of their mandate with the declarations rendered upon leaving office.

But senators sitting in the 12th Par-

liament rejected the law, thus opening a procedural impasse that prompted 44 deputies to petition Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali earlier this month to pressure the 40-member, appointed Senate to release the anti-corruption draft.

"It is not true that the past or current Senate wanted to stop this draft by holding it indefinitely," Senator Adee Halaseh told the Jordan Times on Wednesday.

"It is simply a procedural matter," he affirmed.

Halaseh, whose 1957-1993 career as justice culminated in his appointments to the Court of Cassation and Higher Court of Justice, maintained that the Senate and the Lower House are equally hand-tied.

"The Constitution stipulates that, since the draft has been rejected by the Upper House, the only way to revive it is by convening a joint session," Halaseh said.

Article 92 of the Constitution stipulates that "should either House reject twice any draft law and the other accept it, whether or not amended, both the Senate and the Chamber

shall hold a joint meeting under the chairmanship of the President of the Senate to discuss the matters in dispute."

"Acceptance of the draft law shall be conditional upon the passing of a resolution by a two thirds of present members of both Houses."

Halaseh conceded that other drafts have ended up rotting on the Senate's shelves for years, but rejected the notion that such occurrences indicate loopholes in the Constitution.

"I do not know what has prevented the Lower House speaker and the Upper House president from holding a joint session [on this draft until now], but obviously such sessions cannot be held every two days," Halaseh told the Jordan Times.

Until now, joint sessions usually have been convened for ceremonial purposes.

Leftist Deputy Nazih Ammarin (Karak), who was one of the signatories of last week's petition to revive the draft, stressed that regulations to ensure transparency are crucial to the development of democracy.

"Nobody can talk of democracy

when officials are not bound to a code of conduct," Ammarin noted.

In most Western countries, separate codes of conduct require that parliamentarians and ministers declare their properties and provide relevant legal documents upon they are sworn in. Independent commissions assess the amount of officials' properties when they leave office, and in most cases require officials to divest of certain interests that may conflict with their positions.

Two ministers in the government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair resigned in December over a home loan that, although perfectly legal, was lent by an institution under investigation by the government and had not been declared upon the assumption of their powers.

In Jordan, Article 44 of the Constitution forbids ministers from "purchasing or leasing any government property... becoming a member of the board of directors of any company, taking part in any financial or commercial transaction or receiving a salary from any company."

While most politicians and deputies

have stressed the need for further legislation to obligate officials to declare their assets, opposition figures insist that would not be enough.

"The 1992 draft was inadequate and incomplete, because, although requiring officials to declare [their assets and income], it did not introduce any mechanism to hold them accountable," said Toujan Faisal, a prominent opposition leader and Jordan's only woman deputy.

"Deputies say the law is in the Senate and the Constitution does not allow them to get it back. True. But they could still pass another anti-corruption law, a better one than the original draft, with another name," she contended.

A combative Faisal, who held the Third District Circassian seat when the anti-corruption draft was submitted to the Upper House, gave her reading of the issue.

"I believe that senators rejected the draft because they wanted to be excluded from it," she alleged.

"How much closer can you come to a confession of corruption?"



## Charges against Anwar amended

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP)

Corruption charges against ousted Malaysian deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim were amended Wednesday shifting the emphasis away from sexual misconduct to abuse of power, as the defence threatened to call Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to testify.

Judge Augustine Paul allowed the changes ruling they were not significant, but Anwar reacted angrily during a recess in the hearing.

The former deputy prime minister, who has alleged he is the victim of a political conspiracy, accused the prosecution of making the amendments because it could not prove the charges. "They have already stripped me naked. Now they are amending the charges. They cannot prove ... they change," he told reporters in the court.

In a full statement read later by his wife Azizah, Anwar said the amendments would not "mask the truth." "What were the prosecution motives in these amendments of the charges? Is this an extension of the mala fide prosecution and political conspiracy that the defence has contended throughout?" he demanded. "Whatever the prosecution may say to try and explain the amendments to the charges at this late stage, the truth is crystal clear... it does not matter. Anwar will be vindicated."

Anwar, 51, is on trial on

four counts of corruption for allegedly using his position to order police to quash charges of sexual misconduct made against him by Azizah Abu Bakr, his former driver, and Ummi Hafilda Ali, the sister of his then-private secretary.

Part of the amended charges state that "to save yourself from embarrassment," Anwar directed police to obtain written denials from Azizah of "allegations of sodomy" made in a letter to Mahathir.

The amendments also state that Anwar directed police to get a written denial from Ummi of "allegations of sexual misconduct and sodomy" made in a report to Mahathir in August 1997.

The changes drop the word "committed" used in the previous charges which said he ordered police to get Azizah and Ummi to "deny sexual misconduct and sodomy committed by him in order to protect himself from criminal action or proceedings."

"The major change if any, refers to the commission of the sexual misconduct and sodomy, which on the reading of the (old) charges, is not really a substantive element to be proved," the judge said.

The changes mean the prosecution will not have to prove that Anwar did indeed have an affair or commit sodomy, but only that he used his position to influence the police to quash the investigation.

The surprise move came



Augustine Paul (centre), the judge in the trial of ousted former Malaysian deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim, salutes police guards as he leaves the court in Kuala Lumpur. Paul allowed the prosecution's amendments, shifting the emphasis away from sexual misconduct to abuse of power, as the defence threatened to call Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to testify (AFP photo)

as the prosecution wrapped up its case in the 11th week of the trial, with both sides set Thursday to summarise the evidence, starting with the defence.

The defence team is expected to take one day to argue the case should be dismissed, but if the judge rules there is a case to answer, the defence will then begin to call its witnesses.

Anwar will take the stand first, defence counsel

Christopher Fernando told reporters after the trial adjourned for the day.

But he told the court earlier that if the judge rules there is a case to answer the defence would seek to call Mahathir and Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin to testify.

Both men were originally on the prosecution list of witnesses but were not called.

Daim, an old political foe of Anwar's, was named

Friday as the new finance minister to replace Anwar sacked by Mahathir on Sept. 2 and arrested 18 days later.

"In the event that the defence is called, we would like to call the prime minister, the number one on the list. Number two will be Daim," Fernando told the court.

"We also want to call (International Trade and Industry Minister) Rafidah Aziz who is not on the

(prosecution) list," he said.

Fernando named 24 witnesses including former inspector-general of police Rahim Noor, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Megat Junid Megat Ayob and his former actress wife Norziela Jalil.

Since Anwar's corruption trial began on Nov. 2, his lawyers have tried to implicate a number of politicians in what they say is a conspiracy to topple the former deputy leader.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Primakov criticises U.S. sanctions over technology exports

MOSCOW (AFP) — Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov Wednesday criticised Washington's decision to penalise Russian institutes suspected of leaking sensitive technology to Iran as "counterproductive for relations." "Actions of force or the use of sanctions against our organisations is counterproductive for Russian-American relations which are very important for us," Primakov was quoted by the Interfax news agencies as saying. "After the appropriate consideration we will define our position," Primakov added. Having already penalised seven Russian institutes and companies last July for suspected ties with Iran, Washington slapped sanctions on three more on Tuesday — the Moscow Aviation Institute, the Mendeleyev University and the Scientific Research and Design Institute of Power Technology. Washington has insistently nagged at Moscow over its ties with Tehran, expressing grave doubts about a Russian project to build a civil nuclear reactor in southern Iran and scrutinising research units in Moscow closely for technology and know-how leaks.

### Congo troops massacre 300 civilians, say refugees

BANGUI (AFP) — President Laurent Kabila's troops massacred at least 320 civilians last week in the north-western Equateur province of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), refugees told AFP Wednesday. Refugees in Central African Republic (CAR) said their provisional toll included 120 people slaughtered in Zongo and 200 at Libenge, on the border between the two countries. They added that the figures were backed up by some officers in the DRC army itself. Kabila's troops hold Zongo and Libenge and, with allied forces, are fighting an insurgency in parts of the vast former Zaire. One witness who fled Libenge from the CAR said that the Congolese Armed Forces "were looting and burning houses, holding the population to ransom, systematically arresting boys and young men aged between 10 and 25, and shooting people by the dozen. I was personally present at the execution of 11 men, and I was able to save three of them, because they pretended to be dead," he said.

### Two Swiss ministers to resign

BERN (AFP) — Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti and Justice and Police Minister Arnold Koller Wednesday said they were resigning from the Swiss government. The two ministers said they would quit the government on April 30, both after 12 years in the cabinet. There were no immediate reasons given for their departure. Legislative elections are scheduled for October. Both men are members of the Christian Democratic Party.

### Sister of John F. Kennedy visits Vietnam

HANOI (AFP) — Jean Kennedy Smith, sister of assassinated President John F. Kennedy, and her adopted Vietnamese daughter have just completed a visit to Vietnam, a local report said Wednesday. In an interview with Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper Smith, a former U.S. ambassador to Ireland, said she wanted to see the changes in Vietnam since its reform policies launched more than a decade ago. "I would like to emphasise the word peace," she told the newspaper after visiting the Museum of War Remnants in Ho Chi Minh City. It was the first visit to Vietnam for Smith who was travelling with her adopted daughter Kym Maria Smith. They stayed from Jan 9-11. U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war escalated dramatically while Kennedy was president from 1961-1963, during which time thousands of military "advisers" were sent to South Vietnam. Kennedy's son, John Kennedy Jr., has visited Vietnam twice.

### Russian soldier commits suicide — and then kills officer

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian soldier shot himself Wednesday and then, before dying, shot and killed an officer who had rushed to his aid, a Russian news agency reported. The incident occurred at an army post in Makhachkala, the capital of the troubled southern region of Dagestan, which borders Chechnya. ITAR-TASS said. According to military officials, Pvt. Igor Afanasyev shot himself in an apparent suicide attempt shortly after 6 a.m. An officer, Sgt. Maj. Islam Kilbaliyev, heard the shot, rushed to Afanasyev's post and tried to grab the gun from the private's hand. Afanasyev shot Kilbaliyev in the head, authorities said. The officer died immediately, and Afanasyev died moments later. The Russian military has been plagued by suicides and homicides in recent years. Military morale is low, soldiers have gone months without pay and sometimes are not adequately clothed and fed. Hazing is also a serious problem, although the commander of Afanasyev's brigade, Col. Leonid Kizilo, told reporters that it was not a factor in his suicide. ITAR-TASS said.

### Malaysia will rehire rat catchers to get rodents out of airport

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Four days after a Malaysian Airlines flight to Australia was forced to return when a rat was spotted on board, a top official said Wednesday that rat catchers would be hired to end the menace at the Kuala Lumpur airport. The government viewed Friday's incident seriously because it could disrupt airline operations. Transport Minister Ling Liong Sik was quoted as saying by the national news agency Bernama. Rats pose a danger because they like to nibble on electrical wiring. When work on the Kuala Lumpur International Airport started, local experts were hired to exterminate rats in the area, which was previously an oil palm plantation. Ling said. About 700 to 800 rats were believed to be in the vicinity of the airport, he added. "I must check whether the experts have been dismissed or not. We need those experts to get rid of the rats from the airport," he said. Friday, a Malaysian Airlines flight to Perth, carrying 251 passengers and 15 crew members, returned soon after a rat was found in the first class section of the aircraft.

### Moscow woman arrested for selling baby for \$6,500

MOSCOW (R) — Police have arrested a jobless woman for selling her five-month-old son for \$6,500 on one of the city's busiest squares, Moscow officials said Wednesday. Spokesman Yevgeny Ryabitshev said police arrested the 22-year-old woman after observing a man hand her money in exchange for the baby on the square, which leads to three main train stations. It was the first such case reported in the city, Ryabitshev said.

## Indonesian military replace battalion commander in Aceh

JAKARTA (AFP)

The Indonesian armed forces Wednesday replaced the commander of a battalion whose members were involved in the killings of four Acehnese under military detention, a military official and a resident source said.

Major Bayu Najib, commander of Battalion 113, was succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel Bambang Haryana at an official handover ceremony in the city of Lhokseumawe, an officer at the military headquarters there said.

North Aceh district military chief Colonel Johnny Wahab was quoted by the source as saying the replacement was "just a routine" change of command.

Saturday, four detainees were tortured to death by members of the battalion Najib headed, exacerbating the military's already poor human rights record in the province. Wahab's adjutant declined to tell AFP the fate of the former battalion commander, saying he had no authority to do so.

The military have since Saturday arrested 16 soldiers who attacked 40 people held in a building after being arrested during military raids to track down a Free Aceh separatist leader and two soldiers believed held by the separatists.

Rights groups, including London-based Amnesty International, have condemned the killings of civilians, during the raids launched in Aceh on Jan. 3.

Tuesday, the Commission for the Missing and Victims of Violence (Kontras) urged Armed Forces Commander General Wiranto to halt the operation.

Kontras chairman Munir said at least 17 villagers, some of them women, had been killed by the military since the beginning of the operation.

Wiranto said Wednesday those responsible for the atrocities would be brought to justice.

"For ABRI (the Indonesian armed forces), actions by soldiers such as that cannot be ignored and as a form of accountability from the military, I have ordered the comprehensive investigation on the soldiers who did the action and regardless of their rank. We will take action against them," Wiranto said.

Speaking after meeting with Indonesian President B.J. Habibie at the palace, Wiranto labelled the attackers "a group of indiscipline soldiers who did not respect the law."

They had "brutally tortured the detainees, even leading to some killed."

"This is something that I think is very saddening ... I hope it (the case) can be soon brought to trial in an honest, fair and open process," Wiranto said.

Information Minister Lieutenant General Yunus Yosfiah, speaking to journalists after a cabinet meeting at the palace quoted Habibie as having stressed there would be no change inside his cabinet,

including the armed forces chief, until his current term ends in November.

Wiranto also called on public and religious leaders in Aceh, where rights advocates have accused the military of mass rights abuses during a decade of anti-rebel operations there, to help calm the local population.

He was referring to the killing of seven soldiers in Aceh last month and the abduction of another two.

Public figures in Aceh, he said, "should also help prompt the Aceh population which currently is forgetting the law and the unity and cohesion of the nation, to immediately halt these saddening things."

He also reminded others, including non-governmental groups and political leaders, to help seek a solution to the problem in Aceh "and not make use of the situation and heighten the tension of the situation."

And it should not happen that this is turned into a political commodity for a particular interest," he added. The Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh) movement, that the military said is now led by Achmad Kandang, 46, has been active in Aceh since the mid-1970s, seeking a separate Islamic state.

Aceh was designated as a "military operation area" for 10 years until last year, a status that allowed the deployment of troops from outside the province to help anti-rebel operations.

## Japanese parties strike deal on coalition

TOKYO (AFP)

Japan's ruling party Wednesday struck a deal to launch a coalition government, an official said, on the eve of a cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi.

Members of the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and opposition Liberal Party "reached an agreement" over the divisive issue of Japan's military role overseas, said a Liberal Party official.

The deal, stuck minutes after Obuchi's return to Japan from a week-long European tour, opened the way for a coalition government to be launched with a minor cabinet reshuffle Thursday.

Senior members of the two parties were to confirm the coalition agreement later in the day, the official said.

LDP secretary general Yoshiro Mori, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka and Liberal Party president Ichiro Ozawa were to meet to finalise the deal in the evening, he said.

Key ministers are expected to retain their posts in the

new cabinet but the main focus of attention is whether it will feature anyone from the Liberal Party, particularly its leader Ozawa.

Public television said at least one Liberal Party member would be included.

The LDP has a comfortable majority in the lower house but a conservative coalition is needed to bolster its position in the upper chamber, where its minority position was battered by a poor showing in July 1998 polls.

The two parties have been at odds over Japan's military role in U.N. peacekeeping operations, with the opposition Liberal Party seeking a stronger role.

Negotiations over the coalition had been tortuous and appeared to be in danger up to the last minute.

Senior Liberal Party officials had "pledged that they want to put the final touches by the end of the day so we wish them to make sincere efforts towards a final settlement," the chief cabinet secretary told an earlier news conference.

"We for our part would like to make sincere efforts."

The Liberal Party previously made it clear that it would not sign the coalition deal if the LDP did not compromise on defence policy, but the gap was narrowing.

Nonaka suggested that even if the last-minute talks failed to pave the way for Thursday's cabinet reshuffle, the agreement could still be sealed by Obuchi and Ozawa.

The possibility of negotiations between Obuchi and Ozawa "will depend on the outcome of the dialogue this afternoon and for now we want to see how it will go," he said.

The LDP and Liberal Party have so far agreed in principle to cut the number of lawmakers and abolish the parliamentary system which allows bureaucrats to answer questions in place of ministers.

Talks on the two remaining issues — tax reform and cutting the number of public servants — could be postponed until after the two parties form a coalition.

## High-tech executive leaves job to investigate UFOs

SAN JOSE, California

(AP) — A multimillionaire executive has resigned from the Internet firm he founded to promote his belief that many high-tech advancements — including fibre optics and lasers — come from aliens.

Joe Firmage, 28, said he decided to quit his post Friday as the chief strategist at USWeb/CKS Corp. to save the company from "public relations complications" as he pursues his investigations.

"There is a bigger picture out there than just tomorrow's stock price," Firmage said. "I've had explicit confirmation that the UFO phenomenon is in fact occurring, and I'd like to be a part of this fundamental revolution in our society."

Firmage said he is willing to risk his career to publicise his theories, one of

which is that many technological advancements can be traced to a purported alien spaceship crash in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947.

Firmage founded Serious Corp. at age 17. The company, selling programming tools for personal computer developers, was acquired by Novell in 1993 for an estimated \$24 million.

He left Novell and co-founded USWeb in 1995 with several other Novell executives. Last month the company merged with CKS Group Inc. to form a company with \$260 million in annual revenue.

Firmage said his priorities shifted 15 months ago, after an encounter at his Los Gatos, California, home with a "remarkable being, clothed in brilliant white light ..."

"I don't call them aliens. I

call them teachers," he said.

Since that experience, Firmage has been investigating and publicising what he says is the existence of UFO phenomena.

Reportedly known as the "Fox Mulder of Silicon Valley" — after the alien-chasing FBI agent from the TV series "The X-Files" — Firmage has published a 600-page manifesto, titled "The Truth."

So far, he says the pursuit has cost him \$3 million and quite possibly his reputation as a savvy high-tech businessman.

"I've done a lot in my life," Firmage said. "I have a lot to be thankful for and proud of. I also have shown that I'm rational and level headed."

USWeb/CKS officials said they will miss Firmage and regretted the loss.

## China rejects Albright criticism of rights crackdown

BEIJING (AFP)

China Wednesday told U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to stay out of its internal affairs after she expressed concern over the renewed crackdown on dissidents.

"Xu Wenli and the others colluded with overseas hostile organisations, accepted overseas support and conducted criminal activities to harm state security," a foreign ministry spokesman said.

"This is purely China's internal affair and we oppose the use of so-called human right issues to interfere in other countries' internal

affairs," he said when asked to comment on Albright's remarks.

Albright Tuesday told reporters that the U.S. administration was "very disturbed by what has been going on," referring to Beijing's stepped-up arrests and tough sentencing of dissidents.

In late December Xu received a 13-year term, while Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai got 12 and 11 years respectively for attempting to overthrow the state by setting up a fledgling opposition party.

Monday China's Assistant Foreign Minister Wang

Guangya and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Harold Koh opened two days of talks on human rights that were expected to evoke sharp differences. But as the two sides prepared to reopen talks on the subject — broken off in 1995 — several dissident sources said U.S.-based activist Zhou Yongjun had disappeared while attempting to enter China.

Two other U.S.-based dissidents who secretly reentered China on Nov. 10 have already been sentenced without trial to three years in a reeducation through labour camp.

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But some like Ms. Gil  
after running out of  
some 2,000 Taiwan  
are adapted by foreign  
past two decades



# Sierra Leone rebel leader demands freedom for peace

In a related development, the U.N. Security Council decided Tuesday to maintain a 70-member observer force for Sierra Leone for two more months. The force has been withdrawn to Guinea due to the fighting.

**C-TOWN AMMAN 7th CIRCLE TEL: 581-4129**



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## Sidesteps

THE AMMAN municipality continues to make improvements within the city limits, including expanding and building new parks, constructing more tunnels to help ease traffic congestion, and opening new markets to serve various parts of the capital. One area that has been overlooked, however, is making roads and sidewalks safer for pedestrians.

The current situation in every part of the city makes it difficult for people to cross the street, walk a short distance to the local grocery store, or even take a short stroll to what public parks may be in the neighbourhood. Pedestrians downtown, crowded into tiny alleys, must negotiate ill-placed barriers obstructing their movements. Commuters on University Road have to wait interminable periods to cross the street after completing their bus rides from downtown of Abdali. Car-dodging is the norm for anyone brave, or foolish, enough to want to visit the opposite side of the road. No one even uses the sidewalks for fear of putting out an eye by running into low branches.

Although Amman is not a very pedestrian-friendly city, there are a number of steps that could be taken to ease the plight of people trying to get around on foot. More pedestrian bridges and tunnels should be built to facilitate movement of people travelling by foot and reduce the danger of being struck by poorly-driven vehicles. Traffic lights should be set up at logical intervals to regulate traffic and give pedestrians safe opportunities to cross the street. More traffic lights are especially important for University Road, which drivers treat more like a raceway than a city street.

Finally, sidewalks should be maintained with a view to encouraging people to use them. This will entail pruning away the jungle-like plant growth that forces pedestrians to compete for space with cars on the street. To this end, we propose that citizens begin a "sidewalks for pedestrians, not trees!" campaign to press the municipality to properly maintain sidewalks. Amman's sidewalks also need to be levelled out to reduce the possibility of tripping and injury.

The Amman municipality has made many strides in making the capital a more attractive and friendly city. We ask that it does not forget those who are travelling on foot.

## ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said there are four local issues that deserve to be debated in a national dialogue and which a government or political party should take a clear stand on. They are political democracy, economic reform, peace with Israel and rehabilitating Arab and international relations, said Fanek. Some people think political democracy is still in its first stages, while economic reform has achieved a lot, and others say the opposite. Some people say the peace with Israel came at the right time, and the Kingdom regained its land, water, borders and national security. With respect to Arab relations, Jordan has reassessed its position on the political map after the second Gulf War, placed itself at a distance to the Iraqi regime and got closer to the Gulf states and the U.S., said the writer. But there is a gap between official and public stands on the country's relations with Israel, the U.S., Iraq, Kuwait and other Gulf states, said Fanek. More progress is needed in the democratic march and on economic reform. Jordan no longer has the choice to withdraw from the peace process with Israel and the Kingdom gives priority to relations with Arabs and does not interfere in other countries' affairs, Fanek said.

Al Dustour's editorial said that in the run-up to the Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting, to be held Jan. 24 in Cairo, there is a buzz of activity and numerous meetings discussing the current situation in the region, the Ministers' Meeting's agenda and what can be expected from the conference, Jordan, which was and still is calling for the rehabilitation of Arab solidarity and common solutions, has paid a high price for its stand, said the newspaper. The Kingdom has always called for proper preparations for the Arab meetings to be made, but why the secrecy about the meeting's agenda, asked the editorial; it is as if the results are being prepared before the event. It was said during the preparatory discussions that the meeting will deliberate several issues and not only the Iraqi problem. If the meeting turns into a cause of problems rather than possible solutions to them, said the paper, it could become very dangerous.

## Three cheers for Ghawwar

DURING THE Holy Month of Ramadan, a month which is dear and special in a lot of ways, our society indulges (most of the time unnecessarily) not only in the most delicious dishes, desserts and drinks imaginable (as if, paradoxically and ironically, we refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk for the sole purpose of eating and drinking at night), but also in TV entertainment programmes. Since I had the chance on previous occasions to comment on the former (that which concerns the abdomen), I wish to focus a bit on the latter (that which concerns the soul).

Both local and so-called satellite Arab stations compete, more so during the holy month than in any other, to present entertainment programmes of all sorts: live phone-in shows, contest programmes, popular songs, talks with famous personalities, historical dramas, and especially the so-called TV series — comedy series and soap operas.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with this. In a Ramadan such as this year's — when the evenings are cold, when not many can afford to go out, and when family members gather together more than in any other month — TV is a temptation which many cannot resist. The latter two in the

list of popular Ramadan programmes (historical dramas and TV series, both called "musalsalat" in Arabic) we get a great deal of. A great deal. I should hasten to add, that is — sorry to say — pure junk, worse than junk food. It is actually junk food for the soul.

The former attempt to recreate certain historical moments — both bright and dark spots in Arab-Islamic history. Good idea, good intention, no doubt; but the execution is bad, very bad. Loud music, loud voices, loud colours, didactic sermons, sentimentalised scenes of the most mindless type, the weirdest costumes imaginable and the slowest pace you can think of. As if you were playing something in slow motion for an audience that is so vulgar, slow and thick.

As for the latter, the comedy series, they are even worse. Bad jokes, stupid humour, worse than what the worst clowns present in circuses. Loud voices, didactic sermons, farcical scenes lower than the lowest farce known to mankind. Bluntness, blatancy, explicitness, overtness, shallowness, hollowiness, pure nonsense. The severest insults even to the intelligence of the tiniest babies imaginable.

You wonder with what audience

in mind, such programmes have been produced. As for the audience, the picture is equally grim: thousands, millions glued to TV sets watching. Room for a lot of thought to our educators, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, and intellectuals.

In this grim, depressing, dismal picture, one person (from one Ramadan musalsal) clearly stands out — positively, that is: the talented Syrian actor (a true legend, I would say) Dureid Lahham, known throughout the past three decades to every household in the Arab World as Ghawwar.

His programme ("The Return of Ghawwar") is far from perfect. I would hasten to preface. Some of the scenes are a bit stretched out (most probably to meet the quota of the 30 days of the month), the general outline of the story is soapish, and some of the comment are unfair (they stereotype and offend unnecessarily). On the whole, however, the programme is brilliant.

For one thing, it does not insult the intelligence (a big achievement, in my opinion). For another, it is satirical comedy of the best type. It places society under a microscope and diagnoses its ills and highlights its virtues perceptively.

I like several things about it: its

## A view from Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

post-modernist parody (it pokes fun at the soap operas just spoken of), its subtlety (in its hints, explicit statements, overstatements, and understatements), its scenery, its music, its dialogue, its characters, and its un-didactic moral lesson.

You sit, watch, laugh, feel, vent your frustrations, almost cry, share comments with your family and friends, and enjoy. The programme is much like a good, intelligent classic tragicomedy. It does so many things to you, except one thing: depress you.

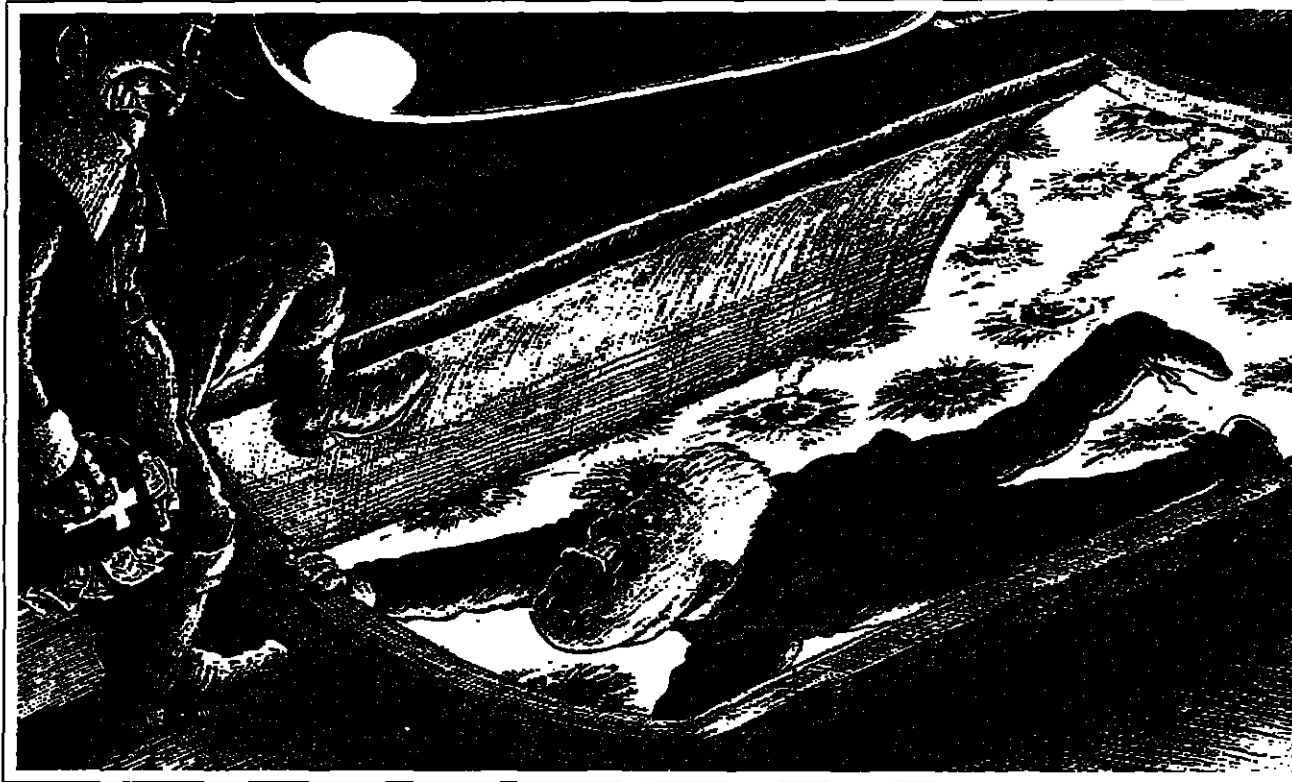
I like many of its suggested and suggestive messages. Two of which stand out. The first is that in today's world the bad — sadly

— outweighs the good, the villains outnumber the well-meaning. The second — very valid sociologically — is that in today's society, we have almost lost the value of friendship — a value which has been deeply-rooted in our culture for a very long time. We have colleagues, cliques, transient alliances, and interest groups — but not friends. I say "almost," however, because true friendship is not entirely dead. Dureid Lahham (at once the post-modernist protagonist and director) is a genius. Not only is he a super actor himself, but he has, over the years, contributed substantially to the making of many talented actors.

More than any other actor in the Arab World (I would venture to generalise), he has also contributed to the happiness of so many people.

The man deserves better recognition and appreciation than he has so far received from our institutions. He deserves the highest Arab Oscar.

Three cheers for the man: first, for not wasting the time of the audience; second, for not insulting the intelligence or depressing the psyche; and third, for appealing to all spectators, children and adults, men and women, the highly educated and the less.



## Washington and Strasbourg: The contrasting fortunes of democracy

By Gwynne Dyer

TO SAY that this week's events show American democracy on its way down and European democracy on its way up would be far too simplistic — but there is a temptation to say just that.

They are more or less impeaching a president in Europe, too. Jacques Santer, president of the European Commission, and all 19 fellow Commissioners face a vote of censure in the European Parliament that could force them out of office by the end of the week. In the new single-currency Europe, a battle is being fought to establish democratic control of the evolving federal state.

How different from Washington, where the topic that obsesses the capital seems quite removed from the concerns of normal Americans. The impeachment of Bill Clinton lays bare both the ideological sectarianism that disfigures American politics, and the burden of a federal constitution extremely intricate and self-cancelling. There is irony here, for 25 years ago Americans were the pragmatists and Europeans seemed hopelessly divided by ideology. Even sharper was the contrast between the cumbersome but time-tested democratic machinery of the U.S. federal government and the unrepresentative and stifling bureaucracy in Brussels that administered the few federal aspects of what we then called the European Economic Community.

But that was then, and this is now. The general decline in deference, and in particular its effects on the mass media, have transformed politics everywhere — mostly for the better, by making it a more open and accountable trade. But it has also raised the body count of disgraced politicians — and in the United States, for quite specific and local reasons, it has gravely undermined the political process.

In most European countries, problems with zipper control are not considered a hanging offence, and politicians are not usually forced to confess them or perjure themselves by denying them.

Moreover, if a politician does disgrace himself by local standards, he is usually out of office by the next day — whereas the U.S. federal constitution makes it practically impossible to

remove the offender. That's why we have had a year of officially sanctioned judicial voyeurism in Washington, and are now watching an utterly futile impeachment process begin in the Senate.

As Alexander Hamilton wrote in the "Federalist Papers" 201 years ago, "the impeachment process" will connect itself with the pre-existing factions...and the decision will be regulated more by the comparative strength of the parties than by real demonstrations of innocence or guilt." The constitution has not changed much since then, and it is still true: the two-thirds majority of votes needed to convict Clinton in the Senate are simply not there.

Nobody would deny that the United States Senate is a vastly more powerful body, with a far stronger democratic tradition, than the European Parliament (which was not even directly elected until the 1980s). What is striking, however, is the trend lines — for as the U.S. system drifts towards paralysis and irrelevance (and the Americans who even bother to vote fall from one-half towards one-third), a pan-European federal democracy is struggling to be born.

It will not stand or fall on the outcome of this week's vote in Strasbourg (where the European Parliament actually sits, to keep it at arm's length from the bureaucrats in Brussels). Indeed, European Commission President Jacques Santer will almost certainly serve out the remaining year of his term, though he may have to sacrifice a couple of his Commissioners. As in the U.S. Senate, the two-thirds majority of votes to oust him is just not there.

But there is something important happening in the European Community. A legislature that only gained democratic legitimacy itself a decade ago is now trying to bring the appointed bureaucracy in Brussels under its control.

The specific issue is accusations of fraud and mismanagement by various Commissioners, compounded by attempts at a cover-up in Brussels. No high drama here — but the undramatic truth is that almost all the historic clashes between legislatures and official bureaucracies that have ended in the extension of democracy have been about the control of spending.

Whether the European Parliament wins or loses this battle, it is likely to win the war, for the far more integrated Europe that is being called into existence by the creation of the single currency needs more democratic institutions. As former Commission president Jacques Delors wrote recently, "It is clear that even with 15 members the European system no longer works adequately" — and there are another ten countries in the queue to join.

Apart from the European Parliament feeling its oats, plans are starting to surface for democratising the rest of the Brussels machinery that will administer the emerging federal Europe. Delors himself, for example, is urging all the socialist parties in the European Parliament to commit themselves to a single candidate for the president of the European Commission in this June's elections.

It is the EU's 15 governments who choose the European Commission, and national governments do not surrender power easily to a democratically elected but multi-national legislature. However, the European Parliament has the right to veto their choice of president — so one can see a deal where the 13 EU countries with left-wing governments agree to choose the candidate of the Strasbourg parliament (where the socialists are the biggest party).

That would give the next Commission president a democratic legitimacy that none of his predecessors have enjoyed. And though it would initially depend on a deal between consenting socialists in Strasbourg and the various European capitals, it would create a tradition that would be hard to ignore in future appointments.

It was by just such gradualism that the U.S. federal democracy took shape: a few states deciding to elect their senators rather than appoint them, for example, ultimately created irresistible pressure for a wholly elected Senate.

It will take time, but Europe is setting off down the same road. And no, democracy and the federal system are not dying in the U.S. They are just going through a very bad patch.

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries

## Majaj and the importance of budgets

DR. AMIN MAJAJ, a Palestinian paediatrician from Jerusalem died last week.

Few outside of east Jerusalem made note of this important man although he made a major contribution in his medical research which was recognised around the world. Majaj was also the elected deputy mayor of east Jerusalem who along with the entire council was sacked by Israel when it conquered the Palestinian areas in 1967, and extended the authority of its west Jerusalem city council to East Jerusalem as well.

While treating Palestinian refugees at the Lutheran Church's Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olive, he was conducting research in a small basement lab. Noting the blood weakness of many of the refugees he was tending to, Dr. Majaj discovered Vitamin E. This discovery in the 50s earned him a place in medical history, an article in Time magazine and a medal of honour from His Majesty King Hussein. His Majesty also appointed Majaj to the Jordanian Parliament, a post he held until the 1980s when Jordan severed its administrative ties with the West Bank which had been part of the Kingdom when Israel occupied it in the June War of 1967.

When I heard the news of the death of Dr. Majaj, I remembered an interview I had conducted with him more than ten years ago. In that interview he told me that the one session of Parliament which he always made sure he attended was the session discussing the annual budget.

The annual budget has been the hot item of discussion this week in both Jordan and Palestine. In fact the role of the parliament and, therefore, the people in approving the state budget was part of the social studies class of my daughter Tamara.

But studying an issue in school in one thing and the application on the ground is another. While in the Kingdom, the years of parliamentary experience has produced a system of discussion and debate — although sanitised and restrained — the situation in Palestine is still not up to par.

After thirty years of occupation in which the budget of the Palestinians territories was considered a state secret, the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority promised to

## Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kuttah

make things different. Three budgets ago the representatives of the Palestinian people were excited to see for the first time a budget containing expected income and expenses for the coming year.

In order to be able to see the budget, the parliamentarians had made a commitment to approve the budget so long as it was introduced to them. At the time, a number of complaints were made about the expenses in the budget and direct accusations were made about the abuse of the spending by the executive. The charges of corruption which were carried on local television stations caused the arrest of the director of one Palestinian television station because it was broadcasting the parliament session. The following year, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council complained that the annual budget was missing some important items in the income category. They stressed that the representatives of the people have the right to know and to approve all public income and spending. Thus, the executive was reprimanded for not declaring certain incomes.

This week, the Palestinian Legislative Council is expecting to review this year's annual budget. Word that the PNA will only submit income and not expenses has raised the blood pressure of members of the legislature who have summoned the Palestinian Minister of Finance. The only explanation for not submitting expenses is that the Palestinian executive has secrets it does not want made public.

Annual budgets are a reflection of where a country was and where it is going. If the Palestinian Authority is serious about its goal of declaring a state in May 1999 it must declare all its expected income and expenses for the coming year and listen carefully to what the representatives of the people have to say concerning it.

This

Eve

Jordan 'chall

By Amy Henderson

Jordan pl

(Continued from p

"We have to thank Prime Minister for giving the deep friendship and wisdom in being Jordan and the Jordanian people. The Jordanian people had one wish, to see the leader (the father) on the people's face, to see the homeland, to see the stability and



Society on the move

# Events in the media on centre stage

Saturday, Minister of Information Nusser Judeh hosted an after banquet for members of the local and foreign press corps at Jubri Banquet Hall. The festive mood was further enhanced as Judeh introduced his VIP guests (all former ministers of information), respectfully recognised former information ministers not in attendance, and presented a few principals from the ranks of the official media. The intensity of the applause received by each name presented spoke volumes about just how the Jordanian press corps rated its relationship with those officials. Following the hearty introductions for popular personalities such as Leila Sharaf (a current member of the Senate) and Ibrahim Izzedine (a former deputy prime minister and now director of the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation), Judeh suggested that with this sort of resounding support the two former ministers might do well to run for elections. Would that former information minister Marwan Muasher had been present, he would certainly have let out his characteristic guffaw, for the applause he received was nearly thunderous. Now when it came to the introduction of the national news agency Petra's director Abdullah Etoun, the nearly 600 journalists in the room broke into a roar of laughter. If nothing else, Etoun is known for his own special brand of humour.



APPLAUSE ALL AROUND: From left to right, Leila Sharaf, Ibrahim Izzedine and Marwan Muasher

events. Ne'mat, who was a reporter for the Jordan Times from 1983-1989, will also write articles and travel to the region for major stories. In London, he will cover Middle East issues as an Al Hayat correspondent accredited to the British Foreign Office. Ne'mat has also been reporting since 1988 for the BBC Arabic Service — that post will need to be filled. Succeeding him as Amman bureau chief for Al Hayat will be Yasser Abu Hilaleh, a former Al Hayat political writer and a reporter with Al Hayat. Ne'mat expects to start his new job on Feb. 1, so between now and then he and his wife Rita will be packing, appearing at the celebrities at a series of farewell parties, and looking for someone to rent their beautiful home in Fuheis. Rita and sons Faisal and Karim will follow Salamah soon after he settles in. We'll still be hearing from him on the

local front, however, as Ne'mat, also known fondly as Heikel, intends to continue writing his Wednesday column in Al Arab Al Yawm.

**VIEWER RESPONSE:** If anyone saw the CNN report presented on Monday by chief international correspondent Christiane Amanpour on honour killings, it should be no surprise that Jordan Times crime reporter Rama Hussein, whose reports on such crimes drew the attention of the global news network, has received a flood of comments via the e-mail. The programme, Newstand, featured Her Majesty Queen Noor who spoke in support of the need to amend Jordanian laws so that this and all other types of violence against women can be eliminated. Rama's work on

courageously reporting on crimes of honour was used to expose the various dimensions of the problem. All but one of the messages Rama has received since the airing of the report, entitled "Blood for Honour," have been supportive of her work. Phone-in comments also included some constructive suggestions on writing about the roots and associated sociological aspects involved in this complex and violent social phenomenon. As one viewer from Omaha, Nebraska, in the U.S. said, "At least writing about it will be a start."

**BOUNCING BABIES:** Our senior colleague at Al Ra'i, Chief Editor Abdul Wahab Zughairat, and his wife Amal celebrated the birth of their sixth child on Jan. 10. Baby Zeid

evens up the score now between the Zughairat boys and girls joining Areej (20), Shada (18), Nada (15), Uday (11) and Mohammad (5). Having surpassed the Kingdom's birth rate, the couple says that they have officially terminated their contract with the stork. But who can believe a journalist?

Another colleague, Agence France Presse Reporter Saad Hattar and his wife Safa have also increased their family by one. Her name is Sophie, who was born on Dec. 2, and was welcomed by big sisters Alice (5) and Atheel (3).

**GET OUT YOUR SHOVELS:** With the Ministry Agriculture's nurseries tenderly nurtured eight million tree saplings, the Haya Arts Centre has announced that it will launch a national environmental campaign entitled "Towards a Green and Clean Jordan for the Country's Children." The campaign will be organised in cooperation with the Amman Municipality and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). Activities include planting fruit and forest trees in selected areas of Jordan's 12 governorates.

Children of all ages are encouraged to take part in this campaign, held under the patronage of Their Royal Highnesses Prince Faisal and Princess Aliya. The campaign will run from Jan. 23 to March 4. The "Green and Clean" campaign kicks off in Wadi Qanar east of Amman where the Amman Municipality has established a national park.

The Ministry of Agriculture has also announced Arbor Day celebrations to begin Jan. 15. So get out their in the fresh air and be environmentally friendly.

Jennifer Hamurich

## Jordan stares down 'challenge of the century'

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — A symbol of the new Millennium — Y2K — swings like a pendulum across the screen of Ahmad Aburagheb's office PC.

Along with it, six counters tick away the number of months, weeks, days, hours, and minutes left until the world rings in a new Millennium.

Most importantly, Aburagheb's screen registers the number of working hours still at his disposal to save off the much-prophesied digital armageddon — wrought by the Millennium Bug — in his corner of the globe, which happens to be Royal Jordanian Airlines (RJ).

For the uninitiated, routing the Millennium Bug, also known as Y2K, is touted as the turn of the century challenge. Most of us will never see the Bug, but may feel it in the potential havoc it may wreak in our daily lives, now heavily reliant on digitally automated systems. These systems we never bear, see or even think of most of the time, but they regulate the most mundane details of our existence: our traffic lights, our water supply systems, our airlines and air traffic, our insurance, elevators, sprinkler systems, taxation and social security systems — the list is endless.

Y2K is not even really a computer bug problem: it's a numbers problem, left over from the 1960s when computers evolved from a technology expo novelty to a fundamental pillar of government and private sector administrations. Programmers then, in order to conserve hard drive memory, embedded dates represented in two digit numbers, rather than four digits — 1999, for example, is represented only as 99. Few early computer whizzes expected their hard and software to be in use at the turn of the century, when four digits will be required to represent the year.

Two digits rolls over the date at midnight, December 31, 1999, it may read that date as Monday, January 1, 2000. To complicate matters, the year 2000 will be a leap year, which means February will have an extra day, only, computers won't know that unless someone tells them, and they will proceed to March while we languish in February.

Already, confused systems in France and the United States have required the long-deceased to register for kindergarten and have denied senior citizens their pensions on the grounds that they've not yet been born.

Although the anecdotes are amusing, the problems are profound, and many are even unforeseeable, says John Cunningham, a U.S. telecoms expert from telecom giant GTE now overseeing the construction of Egypt's national telecommunications network.

"In 1996, a smelting plant in New Zealand sustained major damage after its process control programme failed because the programmer didn't know it was a leap year," says Cunningham, a guest of USIS who lectured in Amman recently on the Y2K. "The system hung up and allowed four calls to over heat. This is just an example of what can happen."

Indeed, the culture of globalisation means that the effects of Y2K may be multiplied since many systems, including those in Jordan, "interface" with systems around the world, meaning that no company, organisation or government is an island unto itself. Even if the problem is solved at home, any system linked to another abroad that is not Y2K "compliant" — or reprogrammed to handle date data properly — may be headed for trouble.

Already, major corporations have stated their intention to cease business with non-compliant companies. KLM (Royal Dutch) Airlines, for example, has said it will not fly to countries whose airports are not compliant by the year 2000.

Air travel is of particular concern since the turn of the Millennium is expected to attract die-hard revellers to the four corners of the globe and deliver an unprecedented number of religious pilgrims to the Middle East.

Aburagheb, assistant vice president of information technology at RJ, states that the airline is, so far, ahead of the game in getting "Y2K compliant."

"I'm confident that RJ is on the right track," said Aburagheb in an interview with the Jordan Times. "We have solved our problem locally and minimised any potential damage from the Y2K problem."

On December 27, RJ launched its cargo operations system as Y2K compliant. The entire process for cargo alone took 18 months. To put the effort in perspective, the system serves 300 users around the world and is linked to 45 offices abroad, which all must also be compliant. Some 380 programmes were modified.

"We are pleased with the result," Aburagheb says. "It indicates that our plan and methodologies are sound and workable."

In mid-January, RJ will test four more systems — 765 modified programmes — including maintenance and engineering, catering, inflight sales and general stores inventory.

Aburagheb says that RJ is waiting for the International Air Transport Association to issue its list of airports and airlines deemed non-compliant.

"RJ won't fly to non-compliant countries," he says.

But "cleaning up" RJ is only scratching the surface of the problem here at home. If one considers that one aircraft alone can require checks and tests of up to 15,000 gadgets, the scope of the problem, or challenge, becomes somewhat more appreciable. So, how big is the Y2K problem in Jordan, and will it be solved at the faithful hour?

The bad news is that no one in Jordan, or the rest of the world, really knows.

"There is a possibility that some sectors will not be compliant," says Youssef Nseir, now heading

the Y2K National Task force emanating from the National Information Centre at the Royal Scientific Society. "I worry that there are major operations, especially in the private sector, that won't be effective."

The Y2K task force has spent the greater part of the last two and a half years explaining the Bug, creating manuals for different sectors, hosting workshops and addressing any questions from organisations and business on how to solve their problems, but he says, Jordan has embarked on confronting the challenge late in the game — other countries started at the beginning of the decade — and some businesses have failed to take the problem seriously.

"I have heard people say that the 'Y2K problem' is a marketing gimmick from hard and software manufacturers to get people to replace their systems," he said during a recent interview with the Jordan Times. "The problem is critical."

Nseir points to the irony that in Jordan, the public sector, often slow to respond to public needs and wants, has attacked the problem far more rigorously than private sector enterprises.

"I would say that at least 70 per cent of governmental and semi-governmental organisations have responded to our urgings that this problem cannot wait and must be dealt with now," he said.

But, he says, response and compliance are two different things. So the task force has identified 30 "mission critical" — or life sustaining — sectors with which it maintains nearly daily contact to track their progress in routing the Bug. They include the energy, telecommunications, banking and finance, utilities, transport and health sectors.

How are they faring? "Not all organisations are taking this seriously," Nseir says. "Banks and telecommunications are doing alright in terms of planning. We don't know yet in terms of their compliance. But the public health sector, for example, has not taken it seriously. The Hussein Medical

City has worked very hard and taken it extremely seriously. The Ministry of Health hospitals have not, and they have a lot of equipment that requires readjustment. We are concerned about this."

The industrial sector is also a cause of concern, he says. "Many whose machines might need to be replaced or modified, which can be expensive, are saying that they will wait and see what happens."

"I cannot emphasise enough that the cost of non-compliance will be much higher than what ever [money] might be saved now," he stressed.

Many have proffered that damage in Jordan will be limited since wide-scale use of computers, made its debut in Jordan only this decade, and thus, the majority of hard and software now in use were programmed with the Millennium in mind.

"This is rubbish," says Nseir. "Whoever dismisses the problem in these terms is unaware of the problem. Equipment five years or more is too old. Even those that are one or two old might not be compliant."

Compliance itself isn't a simple matter. It is related to the availability of manpower to examine, test and upgrade or replace systems; there is a direct correlation to the sheer volume of equipment that must be modified; beating Y2K to the New Year's punch is highly dependent on the vendor from whom equipment was purchased to provide solutions or replacements; and now, with the New Year lurking only 11 and a half months in the offing, it is inescapably linked to time.

"I can't stress enough — there is NO time," says Debbie Bosworth, who oversees the compliance regime at Jordan Mobile Tele-

phone Service (Fastlink). "There are so many variations of the problem. If you haven't started addressing this problem by now, you don't have enough time."

"You rely on people. So many other people. People you are linked to around the world. For us, external vendors are our biggest problem. They deny or fail to respond to our enquiries. We spend a lot of hours just harassing people," she says.

Even if the vendor has the solution, says Nseir, there is no longer a guarantee that a Y2K problem can be solved.

## What if?

By Jean-Claude Elias

### chip talk

THE FIRST electronic spreadsheets for PCs that appeared circa 1984 were sometimes referred to as "What If?" programmes. The expression perfectly translated the main feature of the software. You could start by setting up a complex table of numbers and values interrelated through formulas in many different ways. Then you could stop and wonder: "What if I changed this number only?" Of course all the other values would be immediately recalculated and would therefore show you WHAT would happen IF you did this or that. Manually, without the computer, the recalculations would take much longer to perform.

Naturally spreadsheet software has become part of the daily life of most computer users and its capabilities are now well past the simple "What If" feature. Recently however, and despite all the criticism software companies are facing in terms of selling less-than-perfect programmes and attempts to monopolise the market, I couldn't but think, in a similar way: "What if we didn't have at all any of these application programmes?"

For instance, what if Microsoft never released a piece of software before making sure it was perfect? What if software was more expensive? And so forth.

We can complain, envy Bill Gates success — not to say fortune — criticise Microsoft for the bugs in their programmes, but the fact is we badly need all this software in spite of the flaws and weaknesses. Somehow we must be realistic and accept the fact that we are all part of the huge testing ground for the giant software companies. As big and powerful as Corel, Oracle, Microsoft or Lotus may be, they can't do all the testing it takes to ensure a given product is perfect. Only the millions of users, working on the programmes over weeks, months and years can provide the feedback that is necessary to fine tune and improve the products.

We've become so dependent on word processing, spreadsheets, electronic diaries, databases, e-mail and Internet that the mere thought of "what if we didn't have them at all" sends chills down my spine. The price to pay, that is working with imperfect programmes and having to deal with near-monopolistic companies, is nothing compared to the benefits and advantages these programmes are bringing us.

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## Jordan plans tumultuous welcome for King

(Continued from page 1)

"We have to thank Prince Hassan, the Regent, for giving the deepest meaning to leadership and wisdom while he was leading Jordan and the Jordanian family during critical months," Tarawneh told deputies on Monday.

"The Prince had one worried eye on our father and leader [the King] and another eye on the people and the problems facing the homeland... He protected Jordan's stability and the course of

its wise path and all the people are witnesses to that."

Praising God for the King's recovery and imminent return to Jordan, special religious services will be conducted at different churches and mosques around the Kingdom. Jordanian Muslim women will today hold special afternoon prayers at various mosques in the Kingdom, while on Sunday, churches will conduct services in thanks for the King's recovery.

As for the government, it was decided that each ministry would arrange its own programme for celebrating this happy event.

The Information Ministry has been busy during the last few weeks receiving requests from leading television networks, newspapers and news agencies and trying to facilitate their coverage of the Jordanian people's meeting with their leader. It was reported that CNN might carry the moment live.

The ministry has also prepared for live coverage of the Kingdom's celebra-

tions, which are expected to last for more than a day.

## Sharon: A Palestine inevitable

(Continued from page 1)

The "empty areas" he mentioned could include the Jordan Valley Rift along the border with Jordan, where the sole Palestinian town is Jericho, already Palestinian-ruled. It could also include that part of the Judean desert in the West Bank.

Israel's Labour Party was long in favour of a plan, named after its author, the late Foreign Minister

receives millions of dollars for research and development, had not been renewed.

"There is this unsolved question of the renewal of our membership of the European research and development programme. This snags of interference in our internal affairs," he said.

Israeli press reports have said the EU will make a final decision this week on whether to exclude Israel from the programme for the next four years.





## Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

### Pharmaceutical exports decline

**\*\* EXPORTS OF medicine fell 26 per cent during the first three-quarters of 1998, the Central Bank of Jordan has said. The loss was valued at JD26 million (\$36.6 million), the bank's monthly bulletin said. Nearly all of Jordan's medical exports go to Arab countries. Last year's fall was due to the effects of the world recession, the head of the Jordanian Pharmacists' Association, Abdul Rahim Issa, explained.**

### Saudi Binladen International Group awarded Four Seasons Hotel construction project.

**\*\* A CONTRACT was signed this week at the head office of the Arab Jordan Investment Bank in Amman for the construction and maintenance of the Four Seasons Hotel. Signing the JD25.3 million contract were Abdul Qader Al Qadi, chairman of the Mediterranean Tourism Investment Company (MeTICo) which owns the hotel and Omar Binladen, the general manager of the Binladen International Group which will construct the hotel in cooperation with Jordanian contractors.**

The Binladen Group of Saudi Arabia was one of six international contracting companies which has submitted bids for the Four Seasons Hotel project which, under the terms of the contract will be constructed in 24 months.

MeTICo chairman Al Qadi said the Four Seasons Hotel will be constructed in an excellent location on the Fifth Circle in Jabal Amman on an area of 14,000 square metres. The hotel will consist of 200 rooms and suites built and furnished in accordance with the high standards of Four Seasons International specifications - Five stars plus. In addition, the hotel will have three restaurants, conference rooms, large ballroom for banqueting and weddings, shopping arcade and a service centre for businessmen.

The hotel will be managed and operated by the renowned Four Seasons-Regent Hotels and Resorts which manages 48 hotels in 30 countries worldwide. Plans are under way to construct several Four Seasons Hotels in Arab countries. The Four Seasons Hotel constructed in Amman will be the first in this chain.

Al Qadi added that MeTICo is a public shareholding company with the main shareholders being Arab Jordan Investment Bank, Arab Jordan Investment Company, Kingdom Establishment which is a holding company owned by the well-known international investor Prince Al Waleed Ben Talal, Four Seasons Company in addition to prominent individual Arab investors.

Al Qadi pointed out the fact that Arab and foreign investors were willing to invest in this important project in Jordan is an indication that Jordan has a good investment environment which will be very encouraging for the attraction of more foreign investment for other projects in Jordan. Such projects will be positive for the Jordanian economy and will reduce unemployment in addition to other direct and indirect benefits, he stressed.

Arab Jordan Investment Bank (AJIB), being an investment bank, has acted as a financial advisor for MeTICo. AJIB established MeTICo and sourced investors to subscribe to its capital of JD15 million. The bank was able to attract investors from outside Jordan with the share of non-Jordanians in the company being 50 per cent of its capital.

## Beirut airline sets course for profits

**BEIRUT (R) — Since Fadi Saab took charge of Trans Mediterranean Airways (TMA) at the end of 1996, the Arab World's only all-cargo airline has gone from relentless decline to predictions of a profit this year.**

"We had a mainframe computer the size of this

hall," the long-haired chairman said at the Beirut hotel where his sales agents were holding their annual meeting this week.

"There were no major clients. Strikes made our business a stop and go affair. Our capital was \$6,000 and we have not

hired anyone in 20 years," he added.

Saab convinced Lebanese Air Investment Holdings, TMA's owners, to raise the firm's capital to \$40 million in 1996 and reduced staff to 380 from 600. Today, he said, the airline boasts modern information technology and ISO 9002 quality standards.

"We reduced our debt drastically to a few million dollars and we are on course to return to profitability this year," said Saab.

However, an ageing fleet stands in the way of achieving the lean operation he wants. Functioning aircraft have been reduced to five Boeing 707s after one was retired for use as spare parts at the end of last year.

At its height just before the 1975-1990 civil war TMA was one of the world's major freight carriers with a staff of 2,000 and a fleet approaching 20 aircraft.

Maintaining and fuelling the Boeing account for 60 per cent of TMA's operating expenses, said Saab. He plans to lease more aircraft this year and use the 707s

for African routes as a prelude to their retirement.

Saab said he received offers to hire DC-8s, DC-12s and Airbus 300-B4 which can carry 60 tonnes compared with 40 tonnes for the ageing Boeings.

Despite overcapacity in the industry and an economic slowdown in Lebanon, Saab said his fleet had a 82 per cent load factor last year compared with a 60 per cent average worldwide.

"We manage each departure with sophisticated analysis. Every flight makes a positive contribution to our balance sheet," said the 42-year old chairman, who was hired after presenting TMA owners with a restructuring plan as a consultant.

TMA, founded in 1953, is the only freight airline licensed to fly in and out of Beirut. It accounts for 43 per cent of the 55,000 tonnes handled by the airport annually, competing with passenger airlines which carry cargo in their belly.

Saab said the former government of Rafik Al Hariri gave his firm a concession

to build a \$12 million cargo terminal with a capacity to handle 140,000 tonnes annually. He expects the 12-month project to start this year once the new government familiarises itself with agreements signed by its predecessor.

Saab said TMA was strengthening its Beirut hub while seeking new routes. "The Asian market remains the fastest growing. We must expand to the Far East and North America," he emphasised.

Saab plans by June to have a weekly flight to Shanghai, where he obtained traffic rights in August. An official agreement has also paved the way for flights between Lebanon and Canada, he said.

Europe accounts for half of TMA's business. The carrier flies to over 25 destinations but is banned as a Lebanese company from flying to the United States.

Worldwide air cargo business grew 10 per cent last year but capacity increased 16 per cent. Middle East traffic went up six per cent, said Saab.

### A.F.M. TRADE Wednesday, 13-01-99

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Close	Change
<b>BANKS</b>			
ARAB BK	215.000	217.000	+0.93%
INTL BK	1.540	1.530	-0.65%
CAIRO AMMAN BK	2.850	2.750	-3.51%
BK OF JO	1.230	1.230	0.00%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.470	1.440	-2.04%
THE HOUSING BK	2.740	2.740	0.00%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.630	1.640	+0.61%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.650	1.650	+1.81%
JO. INVEST. BK	1.370	1.340	-2.19%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.540	0.540	0.00%

BANKS INDEX 282.880 POINT +0.69%

<b>INSURANCE</b>			
MIDDLE EAST INS	3.450	3.450	0.00%
JO. FRENCH INS	2.700	2.700	0.00%
AMIA INS	1.110	1.160	+4.50%

INSURANCE INDEX 126.370 POINT +0.22%

<b>SERVICES</b>			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.680	1.700	+1.19%
IRBID ELECTRICITY	1.700	1.710	+0.59%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.790	0.790	0.00%
JO. INTL. TRADING CENT	0.260	0.270	+3.85%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.900	0.900	0.00%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVS. &	1.940	1.940	0.00%
JO. INVS. HOLDING	0.930	0.960	+3.15%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.140	1.170	+2.63%

SERVICES INDEX 110.790 POINT +0.31%

<b>INDUSTRY</b>			
AT-TANOEPP	1.100	1.100	0.00%
CEMENT	3.370	3.290	-2.37%
PHOSPHATE	1.720	1.810	+5.23%
ARAB POTASH	3.240	3.400	+4.94%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.550	10.550	0.00%
THE IND. COM. & AGRIC	1.080	1.080	0.00%
WORSTED MILLS	6.060	6.760	+11.55%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.810	2.880	+2.49%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.210	1.220	+0.83%
INTL. STEEL	0.480	0.500	+4.17%
RAFIA	0.630	0.630	0.00%
JO. STEEL	0.960	0.960	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.850	1.850	0.00%
CHLORINE	1.220	1.220	0.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.400	0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.320	0.320	0.00%
NTL. CABLE	0.640	0.630	-1.56%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.380	0.380	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.230	1.280	+4.07%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.650	0.650	0.00%
FOOD FACTORIES	1.000	1.000	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.440	0.460	+4.55%
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.630	+1.61%
NTL. ALUMINIUM	0.690	0.690	0.00%

INDUSTRY INDEX 84.280 POINT +1.62%

<b>PARALLEL</b>			
EXPORT BK (75	0.890	0.880	-0.00%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.390	0.410	+5.13%
UNION INVS. CORP	0.700	0.700	0.00%
AL - BIKAL	0.780	0.780	0.00%
AL - SHARA	1.030	1.030	0.00%
AL DAWLAH	0.690	0.690	0.00%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.430	0.410	-4.65%
NAMICO	0.280	0.280	0.00%
ZIMMIDE EAST PHAR (30	0.600	0.680	+13.33%
AL NAZI	0.540	0.540	0.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.210	0.230	+9.52%
INTL. CERAMIC	0.400	0.390	-2.50%
NUTRI DAR	0.730	0.710	-2.74%

GRAND INDEX 174.61 POINT +0.67%

## HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, THURSDAY 14, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

**ARIES:** (March 21 to April 19) You're lucky, so you might as well push for what you want next. You could run into a setback, but don't let that stop you. Once you get around that temporary condition, you'll be off and running again. You start out well, and your overall outcome looks like it's going to be successful, so take any hassles in stride.

**TAURUS:** (April 20 to May 20) Today you could be tempted to take a financial risk, which is unusual for you. A case of buyer's remorse could crop up, but if you've done your homework, you should be able to make a good assessment. Don't panic because you're buying something more expensive than usual. If it's going to last longer, it really is a good investment.

**GEMINI:** (May 21 to June 21) Your best teachers today are people you know well, including your spouse and dearest friend. You don't want anyone privy to how much you don't know, but today, let people in on that deep, dark secret. Talk about things you don't understand and let others coach you for a change. You'll find it relaxing, once you get into it.

**CANCER:** (June 22 to July 21) The worst is over, and now all you have to do is clean up the mess. You don't have to do it all by yourself, either. Get a co-worker to help you. Guilt is a pretty effective means for doing that, and you're an expert at gaining sympathy. If that doesn't seem to work, just come right out and ask.

**LEO:** (July 22 to August 21) The work you've done lately is bringing you attention. Make sure you look sharp. People with money and power are giving you the once over, and you may not realise when they're watching. It's always best to assume somebody's looking. There's nothing to worry about, though. You'll have a great time today, and that's the best way to add.

**VIRGO:** (August 22 to September 22) What's going on at your place? It could be a lot of fun, but it looks like there's also a mess involved, and that's a little irritating. You might be getting antsy to straighten things up, and that's good. You'll push the others on your team into getting their stuff in order, too.

**LIBRA:** (September 23 to October 22) You can still do a little more homework before you launch your next project, but you'd better hurry. By tomorrow, you should have whatever it is well under way. You're being drawn in that direction by unseen forces, so you don't have to worry about what its going to be. That should become obvious relatively soon.

**SCORPIO:** (October 23 to November 21) Looks like a raise is possible, or a better job offer. You don't have to sit and wait for it, either. You can put on a little pressure, if you know where to push. You probably do, too. If you're like most Scorpios, you've been thinking about this for quite some time. Go ahead and play that ace you've been holding.

**SAGITTARIUS:** (November 22 to December 21) You should be able to get farther today than you've ever gone before. You're doing well on your own, but you need a little extra boost to go over the top. You'll get that from someone near and dear to you, perhaps a close family member. If you can get that person onto your side, you've got the whole game won.

**CAPRICORN:** (December 22 to January 20) Somebody's leaning over your shoulder, watching your every move. Make sure you're looking good, minding your manners and saying only nice things. If you're a true Capricorn, you talk at deferring to people who think they're important. This time, however, it'd be wise to watch your Ps and Qs. The walls have ears.

**AQUARIUS:** (January 21 to February 19) You and your team are red hot today. You will have some minor difficulties concerning finances, but you'll bounce right over them. As you and your friends share ideas, you'll be coming up with better ones all the time. Keep the banter flowing. But the game you're playing does have rules. Use them to help you stay on track.

**PISCES:** (February 20 to March 20) You're lucky today, but that doesn't mean everything is going to go easily. In fact, that could take a direct hit. A person you respect and admire is rather upset right now, and might take it out on you without even meaning to. If that happens, don't take it seriously. It probably has nothing to do with you. Just roll with the blow.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz.

## Lucent Technologies buying Kenan Systems

**MURRAY HILL, New Jersey (AP) —** Lucent Technologies, the huge telecommunications technology concern, is buying Kenan Systems Corp., which makes software for billing and for dealing with customers, for about \$1.5 billion in stock.

Meanwhile, Lucent was reportedly on the verge of a much larger deal for Ascend Communications Inc., a computer networking supplier based in Alameda, California.

The Financial Times of London said Lucent and Ascend were near a merger that would be worth \$16 billion and that sources close to the talks who said a deal might be announced as early as Wednesday.

USA Today reported Lucent was on the verge of a deal for Ascend valued at more than \$15 billion.

Both companies declined comment to The Associated Press.

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# Steffi Graf continues comeback trail in Sydney

SYDNEY (AFP) — Former World No. 1 Steffi Graf continued her comeback from an injury-plagued 1998 Wednesday, beating American Serena Williams to reach the quarter-finals of the \$750,000 Adidas International.

The 29-year-old Graf played only a handful of tournaments in 1998 because of a series of injuries after being out for most of 1997 due to injury as well.

But she came back with a fury late last year and began this year ranked No. 9 in the world after winning two of the last three tournaments she entered and 12 of her last 13 matches. She continued that roll against Williams, beating the American teen-ager 6-2, 3-6, 7-5, to reach the quarter-finals of the Australian Open warmup where she will face Venus Williams, the elder of the two sisters.

Graf, who beat Japan's Ai Sugiyama in the first round, took the first set easily 6-2, breaking the 17-year-old Serena Williams' first two service games to take a 4-0 lead.

Williams, who reached the semi-finals of last year's tournament by beating current World No. 1 Lindsay Davenport before losing to eventual winner Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in the semis, came back to win the second set 6-3.

The two traded breaks to open the third set before Graf exerted her authority to close out the closely fought final set 7-5, breaking Williams' serve to win the match.

The No. 5 ranked Venus Williams could be Graf's toughest match in the lead-up to next week's first Grand Slam of the year.

Venus Williams overpowered South Africa's Amanda Coetzer 7-6 (7-5), 6-2 to win the right to face Graf.

Graf said facing Serena would help her prepare to face her sister, given their similar playing styles. But she said: "It's going to be difficult. I lost a lot of energy today but it's going to be a new day and it depends a little bit on how I recuperate overnight."

Serena Williams said Graf had appeared fit on the court but faced a tough opponent in her sister, especially following her own defeat.

"She's extremely fast, she's moving well, she's playing pretty good," Serena said of her sister.

"I also think that Venus has a little more desire to win, especially since things didn't go so well for me."

The winner of 21 Grand



Venus Williams of the USA gives everything as she returns a shot to Amanda Coetzer of South Africa in their second round match at the Sydney International. Williams beat Coetzer in straight sets 7-6, 6-2 and will meet Steffi Graf in the quarter finals (AFP photo)



17 year old Australian Lleyton Hewitt, who ranks No. 104 in the world, displays a strong backhand that helped defeat Nicolas Kiefer of Germany, who ranks 36, at the Sydney International. Hewitt beat Kiefer 6-4, 6-2 (AFP photo)

Slam singles titles. Graf spent the month of December in Florida working on her fitness and preparing for an assault on a fifth Australian Open title. She said she felt strong physically although she had found the heat draining in Sydney and felt good generally ahead of next week's Australian Open.

Elsewhere in the women's draw, Russian bombshell Anna Kournikova served her way out of the tournament, losing 6-1, 6-2 to eighth-seeded Dominique Van Roost of Belgium.

Kournikova served 16 double faults in the match, four in one game alone, and vowed to focus on her serve during her layoff before the Australian Open.

"I just need to get my rhythm back," she said. "Also mentally I just have to prepare and learn not to concentrate on it too much."

Van Roost will face former World No. 1 Martina Hingis in the quarter-finals Thursday.

Defending champion Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, who had a bye in the first round, beat Germany's Anke Huber 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 to win a berth in the quarter-finals where she will face Austrian Barbara Schett.

World No. 1 Lindsay Davenport beat fellow American Mary Joe Fernandez 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to get into the quarter-final round where she will face Switzerland's Patty Schnyder who overran Slovakia's Karina Habsudova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

In the men's draw, top seed and world No. 3 Alex Corretja overcame Switzerland's Marc Rosset 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) while fellow Spaniard Albert Costa beat American Jan-Michael Gambill 6-3, 7-5.

Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten beat Australia's Todd Woodbridge 6-4, 6-0 and Australian teen-ager Lleyton Hewitt, who ousted World No. 4 Pat Rafter in the first round, continued his run-up to the Australian Open, defeating German Nicolas Kiefer 6-4, 6-2.

The 17-year-old Hewitt will face American Todd Martin in the quarter-finals. Martin beat Argentina's Mariano Puerta 7-6 (10/8), 6-4.

Austrian Thomas Muster beat French Open champion Carlos Moya 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 to face Australian Jason Stoltenberg who beat sixth-seeded Dutchman Richard Krajicek 6-3, 6-4.

The top seed was 1-3 down in the first set after a string of mistakes before reeling off five straight games.

Tatarakova raced to a 4-3 lead in the second set before Halard-Decugis again steadied and rounded off a comfortable victory.

Fourth-seeded Sarah Pitkowski of France joined her in the last eight, beating Israel's Anna Smashnova 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 in a long baseline duel.

With Nathalie Dechy having progressed Tuesday, France has three players in the quarter-finals.

Black, younger sister of Zimbabwe's Davis Cup brothers, Byron and Wayne, was always in control of her match. Her 6-3, 6-3 win means only four of the eight seeds have survived to the last eight.

Australia's Nicole Pratt and American Amy Frazier were to decide the final quarter-finalist later Wednesday.

forced to pay back the \$94,000 he earned at Wimbledon.

"Maybe it's not for me to comment but if there is any kind of doping you really have to act on it very strongly," Graf said.

"There must be some reason that there was no reaction from the ITF ... I don't understand it."

"Maybe there's more to it. I don't know."

The ITF's appeals committee decided against suspending Korda because of "exceptional circumstances" which have yet to be revealed.

## Agassi downs Korda

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Andre Agassi took advantage of Petr Korda's agonising over a drugs furore on Wednesday as he staked a claim to be one of the favourites for next week's Australian Open.

Agassi crushed the reigning Australian Open champion 6-2, 6-1 in just 56 minutes at the Kooyong Classic exhibition event.

Korda faces a compulsory Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) meeting here on Saturday, with fines for players who do not attend, to thrash out his lenient punishment after failing a drug test.

And the inner turmoil Korda is experiencing was evident when his serve was broken five times by Agassi.

"My legs were stiff, I've been working hard these last days and after the long journey coming here and working hard my legs are not in the condition I want, but I have another few days to work, to loosen them up and gain the speed again," Korda said.

The 30-year-old Czech has vowed he will take part in the Australian Open next week and insisted that he has nothing to hide over his drug failure.

Korda tested positive for steroids at last year's Wimbledon but it was kept quiet until an International Tennis Federation (ITF) appeals committee only docked his Wimbledon

prize-money and computer points from the tournament.

Many players were furious that no ban was imposed. But the ITF now says it will challenge its own committee's verdict and press for a ban.

Korda was happy to let Agassi take the spotlight at the traditional Australian Open warmup event.

Agassi, who beat Pete Sampras for the 1995 title, looked in great shape as took advantage of Korda.

The flamboyant American, whose game peaked when he overtook Sampras as world number one in April 1995, has worked his way back to number six in the world after a disastrous 1997 that saw him tumble outside the top 100 players.

"I feel more ready now than I have in a long time," said 28-year-old Agassi, now in his 15th year on the

record at the Open, she knows the depth of competition will make it far more difficult this time.

"There are probably 10 players in the women's draw who are a chance to win it," she said here.

"I put this year up with 1991 in terms of quality and it is great there are so many players in with a chance."

Seles is rated a 9-1 chance to win the Open with local bookmakers. Martina Hingis is the 3-1 favourite, while world number one Lindsay Davenport, Steffi Graf and Venus Williams are heavily fancied.

However, such is the improvement in women's

record at the Open, she knows the depth of competition will make it far more difficult this time.

"There will probably be a couple of floaters in the draw," she said.

Seles had to take a year off after being stabbed by a Graf fan during a Hamburg tournament in 1993 and her father and coach died last year.

But she is determined to get established again to add to her nine Grand Slam victories — four Australian, three French and two U.S. Opens.

Seles' incredible



Andre Agassi of the USA (L) shakes hands after defeating Petr Korda of the Czech Republic (R) in their match at the Kooyong Classic in Melbourne. Agassi defeated Korda 6-2, 6-1 who is facing pressure from fellow players and the ITF after returning a positive drug result at last year's Wimbledon tournament. Kooyong is a round-robin event which is used by the top players as a warm-up event for the 1999 Australian Open (AFP photo)

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Seles' incredible

## French trio in Tasmanian International quarters

HOBART (AFP) — Former winner Julie Halard-Decugis made it a French threesome in the quarter-finals of the Tasmanian International women's tennis tournament here Wednesday with victory over Ukrainian Elena Tatarakova.

The French top seed won 6-3, 6-4 and will meet Zimbabwe youngster Cara Black, who knocked out Chinese eighth-seed Fang Li in straight sets.

Halard-Decugis, who won here in 1996, and Tatarakova both produced some wonderful shots but mixed them up with too many errors.

The top seed was 1-3 down in the first set after a string of mistakes before reeling off five straight games.

Tatarakova raced to a 4-3 lead in the second set before Halard-Decugis again steadied and rounded off a comfortable victory.

Fourth-seeded Sarah Pitkowski of France joined her in the last eight, beating Israel's Anna Smashnova 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 in a long baseline duel.

With Nathalie Dechy having progressed Tuesday, France has three players in the quarter-finals.

Black, younger sister of Zimbabwe's Davis Cup brothers, Byron and Wayne, was always in control of her match. Her 6-3, 6-3 win means only four of the eight seeds have survived to the last eight.

Australia's Nicole Pratt and American Amy Frazier were to decide the final quarter-finalist later Wednesday.

## Seles Open record faces stiff test

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Monica Seles said Wednesday that competition to win the Australian Open women's title was so cut-throat that at least 10 players had a chance.

The former World No. 1 will be one of them as she is still unbeaten in Melbourne despite her personal tragedies in recent years.

Seles has won 28 matches at the event and claimed the women's title on each of her four visits here in 1991, 92, 93 and 96.

She missed 1997 through injury while last year she opted out for personal reasons.

Despite Seles' incredible

record at the Open, she knows the depth of competition will make it far more difficult this time.

"There are probably 10 players in the women's draw who are a chance to win it," she said here.

"I put this year up with 1991 in terms of quality and it is great there are so many players in with a chance."

Seles is rated a 9-1 chance to win the Open with local bookmakers. Martina Hingis is the 3-1 favourite, while world number one Lindsay Davenport, Steffi Graf and Venus Williams are heavily fancied.

However, such is the improvement in women's

record at the Open, she knows the depth of competition will make it far more difficult this time.

"There will probably be a couple of floaters in the draw," she said.

Seles had to take a year off after being stabbed by a Graf fan during a Hamburg tournament in 1993 and her father and coach died last year.

But she is determined to get established again to add to her nine Grand Slam victories — four Australian, three French and two U.S. Opens.

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Seles' incredible

## Davenport and Graf puzzled by Korda drug mystery

SYDNEY (AFP) — Lindsay Davenport and Steffi Graf called Wednesday for a new probe into why the International Tennis Federation (ITF) let Czech star Petr Korda off for a drugs offence.

Davenport, the current World No. 1 and Graf, winner of 21 Grand Slam titles, questioned Korda's claim he did not know how the steroid got into his system.

The ITF accepted his explanation for a positive drugs test after losing in the Wimbledon quarter-finals and has allowed him to defend his Australian Open title in Melbourne next week.

"It seems to me that they've now set a precedent ... if I ever get caught I'm

just going to say 'I don't know how it got there and every other player is going to say that.' Davenport said after reaching the quarter-finals of the Adidas International in Sydney.

"They've opened a can of worms."

"From what I've heard about this drug it has to be injected and if you're getting a shot, you know your getting a shot in your body," the American added.

"I would just like to know why he was let off ... to say he didn't know how it got into his body, I don't know if that's true."

Graf also questioned why the ITF did not suspend Korda for one year from Grand Slam events. He was only

forced to pay back the \$94,000 he earned at Wimbledon.

"Maybe it's not for me to comment but if there is any kind of doping you really have to act on it very strongly," Graf said.

"There must be some reason that there was no reaction from the ITF ... I don't understand it."

"Maybe there's more to it. I don't know."

The ITF's appeals committee decided against suspending Korda because of "exceptional circumstances" which have yet to be revealed.

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## McGwire home run ball sells for record-shattering \$2.7 million

NEW YORK (AFP) — The baseball that St. Louis Cardinal slugger Mark McGwire hit for a record 70th home run last season broke its second record on Tuesday, selling at auction here for \$2.7 million.

With commission, the buyer, who placed the winning bid by telephone, will fork over \$3.04 million to Guernsey's auction house for the ball originally made in Costa Rica for less than five dollars.

The staggering price paid for the ball at the auction of 40 items of sports memorabilia at Madison Square Garden was 22 times higher than the previous record which was paid just two months ago for one hit by New York Yankee great Babe Ruth.

The name of the buyer was not immediately available but businessman Irving Sternberg, who dropped out of the bidding at \$2.6 million said he had wanted "the ball to be used as a symbol of the nation and of baseball."

He added that he hoped the new owner felt the same way. The ball passed into legend on September 27 when McGwire, the Cardinals' first baseman, belted it into

the stands at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, setting a new Major League Baseball home run record.

Researcher Philip Ozersky, who earns \$30,000 a year, recovered the ball, immediately had it authenticated and deposited in a bank vault for safe-keeping before deciding to sell it.

"I am completely exhilarated," Ozersky said after the sale, adding that he wanted to give at least some of his windfall to medical research groups such as the American Cancer Society and American Leukemia Society.

"I never would have expected to get any money from this," he said of his attendance at the September 27 game. "Now I am going to sit with my lawyers to see how to distribute the money."

The balls that McGwire slugged for home runs 63, 67 and 68, which at the time they were hit were records themselves were also auctioned and fetched a total, including the 15-per cent commission, of \$142,600, according to Guernsey's President Arlen Ettinger.

In addition, three balls blasted for home runs by Chicago Cubs outfielder Sammy Sosa — his 61st, 64th and

66th — sold for a total of \$216,500, Ettinger said.

Sosa and McGwire were embroiled in a neck-and-neck race towards the end of the season to break the old record of 61 home runs set by New York Yankees outfielder Roger Maris in 1961 and set a new one.

Their battle captivated Americans last fall.

The Dominican-born Sosa and native Californian McGwire remained on best of terms throughout the race with each congratulating each other when they surpassed a new level.

Sosa ended the season with 66 home runs.

A pair of shoes that McGwire wore in three games in which he hit home runs brought \$5,000.

Although the auction brought in a total of \$3.667 million, the lion's share of which came from the McGwire ball, the ball hit by Hank Aaron for his career 755th home run did not sell.

That ball, which some had hoped would sell for as much as \$1 million was withdrawn from sale when bidding stalled at \$800,000.

### MICHAEL'S GOLDEN MOMENTS

CHICAGO (AP) — Some of Michael Jordan's most memorable big-game performances:

— The skinny freshman's 1982 corner jumper that beat Georgetown in the NCAA Finals and gave North Carolina's Dean Smith his first national title.

— The still NBA play-off-record 63-point performance against Larry Bird and the Celtics in 1986 after missing all but 18 games of the regular season with a foot injury. "God came to the game tonight and played under the name of Michael Jordan," Bird said. The Bulls lost the game 135-131.

— The Shot. With the Bulls down one point in the deciding fifth game, he went high over Cleveland's Craig Ehlo to hit a jumper that clinched the opening-round series against the Cavaliers in 1989.

— The highlight-film drive against the Lakers in the 1991 Finals, changing hands in mid-air for an acrobatic, left-handed bank shot on the other side of the basket.

— The shrug after raining down 3-pointers against Portland in the opener of the 1992 Finals as the Bulls went on their second title. He hit a playoff-record six 3s in one half against the Blazers.

— The Shot II over Gerald Wilkins, beating Cleveland again in the Eastern Conference semifinals, 1993.

— The winning jumper over Steve Smith against Atlanta in just his fourth game out of retirement in 1995.

— The game-winning jumper over Bryon Russell in the opener of their 1997 NBA Finals against Utah.

— His game-winning 3-pointer and 38-point effort against the Jazz in Game 5 — 15 in the final period — when he was so sick and dehydrated he was doubled over at times as he walked off the floor.

— His steal and game-winning jumper to beat the Jazz in the closing seconds of Game 6, giving the Bulls their sixth title of the decade last June.

## Michael Jordan officially announces retirement

CHICAGO (AP) — Michael Jordan, who won six U.S. league titles with Chicago Bulls and made the NBA popular throughout the world with his high-flying dunks, officially retired from basketball on Wednesday.

"I played it to the best I could play it," Jordan told a packed news conference at the United Center, the Bulls home court. "I tried to be the best basketball player I could be."

"I've had a great time," he said.

Jordan alluded to his first retirement in 1993, when he briefly pursued a professional baseball career.

"Well, we do this again, a second time," he said.

Word of Jordan's retirement broke late Monday night, but he had refused to comment until Wednesday. After leading the Bulls to their sixth championship in June, Jordan had said he would make an announcement on his future only once the National Basketball Association lockout ended.

"I thought about saying just two words, 'I'm gone,' but I thought I owed my fans a lot more than that," he said, with his wife, Juanita, at his side.

"My life will take a change," Jordan said.

He said he looked forward to being a parent and would "live vicariously through my kids," whether or not they played basketball.

"Mentally, I'm exhausted. I don't feel I have a challenge," Jordan said. "Physically, I feel great."

"This is a perfect time for me to walk away from the game."

I'm at peace with that," Jordan at the podium were Bulls chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and NBA commissioner David Stern.

Jordan appeared with a bandage on his right index finger and said he said he severed a



In this 1998 file photo, Chicago Bulls player Michael Jordan answers questions during a press conference at the United Center in Chicago, Ill., during the NBA Finals. Jordan announced his retirement from basketball at a press conference in Chicago Wednesday (AFP photo)

"This is a day I hoped would never come," Reinsdorf said.

"It's a tough day for basketball fans all over the world."

Countered Stern: "I disagree with Jerry. This is a great day. The greatest player is retiring with the grace that describes his play."

Asked if he had lost his desire to play, Jordan responded:

"The desire is always going to be there."

But he said he wanted to make sure that the desire was there "not one-fourth of the time I step onto the court, but every time."

Although he said, "I never say never," he absolutely closed the door on whether he would return to the game.

"I'm very secure in my decision," he said.

"I'm just going to enjoy life and do things I've never done before," Jordan said.

Jordan appeared with a bandage on his right index finger and said he said he severed a

tendon while trying to cut a cigar and would need surgery.

He said he hoped the Bulls would re-sign teammate Scottie Pippen, but he added that was his personal opinion and that he didn't know what decisions would make in signing free agents.

"We set high standards around here," he said. Around the league and throughout the city that worships him, Jordan's impending retirement didn't come as a surprise.

But most acknowledged that neither the Bulls nor the NBA would be the same without him, especially during this lockout-shortened season.

Jordan met with a few teammates at his home Monday and told them the thought of playing an abbreviated, 50-game season wasn't enough of a challenge, the Chicago Tribune reported.

Now Jordan can go out as he always wanted — on top. His last-second shot — the last one he

might ever take in competition — beat Utah in Game 6 in June and gave the Bulls their sixth title.

"There's a way to go out as an athlete, and that's the way to go out," said B.J. Armstrong, one of about a dozen players working out Tuesday at the Berto Center.

Armstrong, who now plays with Charlotte, is a good friend of Jordan's and a teammate on Chicago's first three NBA championship teams.

Jordan leaves as a five-time winner of the league's Most Valuable Player Award, 10-time league scoring champion and the No. 1 per-game scorer in NBA history.

Jordan also claimed three international honours, leading the United States to the 1983 Pan Am Games title, the 1984 Olympic title and was a key member of the 1992 U.S. Olympic "Dream Team" that rolled to the gold in Barcelona, Spain, by an average margin of victory of 43.8 points.

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## IOC to examine Australian bribery allegations

SYDNEY (AFP) — The International Olympic Committee is to investigate allegations by former New South Wales Olympics minister Bruce Baird that he was asked to pay bribes during Sydney's successful bid for the 2000 games.

Australian IOC executive board member Kevan Gosper said Wednesday he had spoken to Baird about his claims that he was approached by one IOC member and an intermediary seeking cash in exchange for votes during the bid in 1993.

"He advised me of two conversations he had at the time of the Sydney bid, which may have been interpreted to be seeking some sort of opportunity," Gosper told ABC Radio.

"I've asked him to set that down on some piece of paper and I'll use that as part of the process we're going to have when I get back to Lausanne next week."

The evidence would be presented to the IOC's inquiry into the bribery allegations involving Salt Lake City, the hosts of the 2002 Winter Games.

Australian Minister for Sport Jackie Kelly called for Baird's allegations to be investigated immediately by the IOC.

"They must be investigated," she said.

Jacques Rogge, who also sits on the IOC executive board and chairs the Coordination Commission overseeing Sydney's preparations for the 2000 Games, said he was interested in seeing any evidence which Baird or others had.

The Belgian said the IOC needed documented facts, not declarations or allegations.

Baird, former state Olympics minister and now a member of the federal parliament, said he could tell investigators about people claiming to represent IOC members who had wanted to do deals to ensure a successful Sydney bid.

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# Watergate-style break-in jolts Israeli election campaign

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's colourful election campaign promised to turn nasty Wednesday after a burglary at a US firm advising Labour Party chief Ehud Barak raised comparisons with the 1972 Watergate scandal that brought down U.S. President Richard Nixon.

In a pre-dawn raid Tuesday on the offices of political consultant Stanley Greenberg, thieves made away with information on Barak's campaign against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud Party in the May 17 elections. Labour Party officials said.

"The burglars stole computer disks containing information on Barak's bank accounts and assets," said Tal Zylberstein, a member of Labour's campaign team. Israeli newspapers said the stolen information also contained Barak's campaign strategy, including details of his planned appearances during the four months leading to the election.

A spokesman for Netanyahu, who is struggling in opinion polls following the collapse of his government last month, quickly denounced the Washington burglary as "unacceptable."

"I hope that those responsible will be quickly arrested," spokesman David Bar-Ilan told AFP.

But suspicion over the break-in nevertheless fell on Barak's right-wing opponents given his position as the leading contender to topple Netanyahu.

Zylberstein told Israeli radio that "according to infor-

mation from Washington, a Jewish group trying to hurt Barak's campaign was behind the theft. He did not elaborate.

"It is clear to us that whoever did it knew that these files contained something that could be very harmful to Barak or very beneficial to Netanyahu," Greenberg associate Steve Rabinowitz told the Yediot Achronot newspaper.

U.S. police spokesmen said they had no leads in the case. Barak himself made no public comment Wednesday.

The break-in occurred at Greenberg Quinlan Research, a firm specialising in political polling and strategy whose clients have included U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The company's star consultant, James Carville, who is credited with masterminding Clinton's 1992 election victory and helped British Labour leader Tony Blair win the premiership in 1997, was in Israel three weeks ago working with Barak's campaign team.

U.S. police said the burglars removed a roof vent and then broke through the ceiling of Greenberg's office in an apparently professional operation which drew the immediate attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In Israel, the press was quick to compare the burglary with the 1972 break-in at Democratic Party headquarters in Washington's Watergate apartment complex.

Members of a White House "dirty tricks" team were caught trying to steal

Democratic campaign secrets and Nixon, facing impeachment over his attempt to cover up the White House role in the affair, resigned from office.

Zylberstein declined to draw such parallels, which imply an involvement in the latest break-in by elements linked to Netanyahu's Likud party.

"This is a sensitive matter and we have to avoid making any hasty accusations," he said.

Labour MP Avi Yeheshkel demanded a parliamentary inquiry into the incident and called for Israeli police to cooperate with the FBI in its probe.

Netanyahu was forced into early elections last month when his right-wing parliamentary coalition collapsed and opinion polls show that Barak is the most serious threat to his reelection as prime minister.

The election campaign turned sour from the very beginning last week with Barak and Netanyahu accusing one another of effectively allying with Palestinian factions to lead Israel to ruin.

Barak, Netanyahu and a centrist candidate for prime minister, former military chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, all received death threats in the first days of the campaign.

The threats recalled the 1995 assassination of Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Jewish fanatic and prompted calls from politicians across the political spectrum for a toning down of the electoral rhetoric.



REGENT JOINS WORSHIPPERS ON LAYLAT AL QADR: His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Wednesday joins worshippers at King Abdullah Mosque for a ceremony organised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs marking the start of Laylat al Qadr. Prince Hassan distributed prizes and shields to the winners of the Hashemite competition for memorising and reciting the Holy Koran (Photo by Yusef 'Allan)

## Butler had U.S. bug installed in Iraq — Ritter

BONN (R) — A German magazine on Wednesday quoted former U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter as saying he last year installed a listening device for U.S. intelligence in Baghdad on orders of chief weapons inspector Richard Butler.

Ritter told Stern monthly he had fitted a listening device for radio and telephone communication which was used by U.S. intelligence to select targets in Iraq for the U.S.-British Operation Desert Fox air bombardment last December.

"I was acting on the orders of Richard Butler," Ritter said, when asked whether he installed such a device when he

worked for the United Nations Special Commission known as UNSCOM in Iraq.

Ritter said their inspections hit an impasse two years ago and he came up with a new concept to obtain secret information about Iraq's secret weapons programme. But in April 1998 Richard Butler declared the new operation over.

"He [Butler] then consented to a new method of surveillance. It was run exclusively for the United States," Ritter said in an interview released ahead of publication on Thursday.

"I protested against it because it violated our mandate and only served the intelligence ser-

vice of one country. That was one reason why I left UNSCOM last August," he said.

Ritter, a former U.S. Marines Lieutenant Colonel, said only Butler and his deputy Charles Duelfer had access to the information acquired through what he referred to as "the black box" listening device, apart from U.S. intelligence.

"Butler was in a difficult position. His chief supporters in the United States put him under immense pressure," Ritter said.

"The U.S. assured him this method of obtaining information under the UNSCOM flag would not be abused."

"No one knows exactly what information they collected. But it is clear that information from my U.N. inspections was used to determine targets for Operation Desert Fox," Ritter said.

UNSCOM was created by the U.N. Security Council after the Gulf War in 1991 to supervise the scrapping of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The commission withdrew all its personnel from Iraq before the Dec. 16-19 U.S.-British strikes.

Ritter has recently given a series of interviews saying Butler had helped Washington spy on Iraq. Butler has denied the allegations.

## Briton freed as Yemen puts tourist kidnappers on trial

SANAA (AFP) — A British hostage in Yemen was released Wednesday as three men were charged for a separate kidnapping last month that left four Western tourists dead after a rescue operation.

John Brooke, an employee of U.S. oil firm Halliburton, was released after mediation by a tribal leader, a Yemeni security official said.

"Our ambassador in Yemen has seen him and finds him safe and well. We are making arrangements to fly him back home as quickly as possible," the British Foreign Office said in London.

Amid repeated British calls for a peaceful outcome to the kidnapping, tribal leaders had been mediating to achieve Brooke's release and offered to pay a ransom.

Yemen's unruly tribes have kidnapped more than 150 foreigners over the past five years to use them as bargaining chips in disputes with Sanaa, mostly over aid for their region.

All of them have been freed unharmed, unlike with the December kidnappings of a group of 16 Western tourists in southern Yemen that was the work of Islamic militants.

Brooke was captured Saturday by armed men from the Al Juaydi tribe in mountains near the eastern oil-producing region of Marib.

He was moved to a hideout near the Saudi border in Khab, more than 200 kilometres north of Sanaa. The tribesmen reportedly demanded the release from jail of one of their men who is facing a murder charge.

It was unclear if concessions were made for Brooke's release.

Meanwhile, in court alleged Islamist ringleader Zin al Abidin al Mehdhar, also known as Abu Hassan, and two brothers went on trial for the kidnapping of the 16 tourists on Dec. 28.

The militants could face the death penalty if convicted under a law introduced last August.

The kidnapping ended in tragedy during a rescue operation the next day by Yemeni security forces. It has not been confirmed which side fired the

fatal shots that killed three Britons and an Australian.

The three suspects appeared handcuffed in court in the southern town of Zinjibar. Eleven others are on the run, according to Yemeni authorities.

They were charged with kidnapping, resisting security forces, illegal possession of firearms and explosives and setting up an armed group blamed for several attacks in south Yemen. No murder charge was filed.

Abu Hassan, 28, acknowledged belonging to the "Islamic Army of Aden and Abyan," which aimed "to lead a jihad [holy war]."

Mocking the court, the bearded Islamist said it was "illegal because it does not apply Sharia [Islamic law] and refers to a Western penal code, in particular the French."

"The miscreant regime of Sanaa does not have the right to judge me because it is subjected to America and Western countries," he said while smiling.

He also rose to the defence of Arab countries such as Iraq, the target of a U.S.-led air war just before the kidnapping.

The other defendants in court, Ahmad Muhammad Atef, 26, and Mohammad Ali Atef, 19, denied the charges. "They're young. I assume full responsibility," said Abu Hassan.

The trial in Zinjibar, capital of Abyan province where the group of tourists were seized, was adjourned until after next week's feast of Eid al Fitr. The British embassy sent a diplomat as an observer.

Three other kidnappers were killed in the rescue operation. A policeman also died in the firefight during which the hostages were used as human shields.

The kidnappers were reported to have demanded the release of fellow Islamists, including five Britons and another man detained by Yemeni authorities on suspicion of terrorism.

A British diplomat has so far seen four of the Britons held in the southern port city of Aden, while the fifth holds dual British-Yemeni nationality.

## State says Israel 'light unto nations' on torture issue

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel is a "light unto the nations" in its interrogation of Palestinian prisoners, a government lawyer told the Supreme Court Wednesday.

Attorney Yehuda Schaeffer was responding to a petition against the use of "moderate physical force" against Palestinians believed to possess information which the authorities need to prevent acts of terrorism.

Schaeffer cited a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that methods used by the British authorities in Northern Ireland against suspected IRA guerrillas do not constitute torture.

"In this as in other matters we are still a light unto the nations," Schaeffer said, referring to a Zionist slogan coined by Zionist thinkers about a century ago, and based on a prophecy of Isaiah.

Schaeffer said the British methods include deprivation of food and drink, and subjection to "white noise" — and are harsher than those permitted by Israel's Shin Bet security service.

The British methods — used on 14 suspects in 1971 — were described by the European court in a controversial 1978 ruling as "inhuman or degrading treatment," but not torture. The British, severely embarrassed by the case, have long since sworn off the methods.

The Shin Bet has never spelled out its methods, but testimony by security agents in court hearings has indicated they include sleep deprivation and tying up suspects in painful positions for several hours at a time.

The United Nations has defined such methods as torture, and human rights groups have

said that at least 10 detainees have died in the past decade as a result of interrogation.

Standards of interrogation in Western countries appeared likely to dominate the proceedings.

The petitioners submitted an affidavit from a lawyer for Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, saying that interrogators never questioned his client unless lawyers were present, even though they "feared that similar attacks in other cities were planned or contemplated."

Robert Nigh Jr.'s statement was provided at the request of the Public Committee against Torture in Israel.

"We submitted the affidavit to show that even the case of a very dangerous terrorist, responsible for the deaths of scores of civilians, can be investigated without resorting to force," said spokes-

woman Hannah Friedman.

McVeigh is appealing his death sentence for the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people and injured more than 500 others.

In addition to the Public Committee, the petitioners include a civil rights group and four Palestinians who claim to have been tortured by the Shin Bet.

When the petition was submitted last May by two human rights groups and four Palestinian individuals, the Supreme Court agreed for the first time to consider the overall policy of using physical force.

At that time, the court indicated that it was likely to refer the matter to the Knesset for legislation. The petitioners hope for a ruling that would allow for the prosecution of alleged Shin Bet torturers.

In earlier individual cases, the court consistently upheld the right of the Shin Bet to use "moderate physical force" to extract confessions. The vague term was coined over a decade ago by a commission investigating the Shin Bet.

Counsel for the state, Shai Feldman, cited cases in which he said it was established beyond doubt that the methods used by the Shin Bet had prevented suicide bombings, saving large numbers of lives.

No decision was handed down Wednesday. The court is to convene again at a later date to hear the arguments of the petitioners.

Human rights groups have also accused the Palestinian Authority of routinely torturing detainees during interrogation, and nearly a dozen prisoners have died in Palestinian jails in the past four years.

## Clinton blasts impeachment process on eve of Senate trial

President hopes 'the right thing will be done'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton stepped up his attack on the impeachment process Wednesday on the eve of the historic Senate trial in the sex-and-lies scandal.

The president's lawyers issued a bolstered version of their defense brief which insists that the charges stemming from the Monica Lewinsky affair do not rise to the level of impeachment and should be dismissed.

"If the Senate removes this president for a wrongful relationship he hoped to keep private, for what will the House ask the Senate to remove the next president and the next?" demanded a 130-page document expanding on the trial brief issued Monday.

Clinton has refrained from commenting on the Senate trial, but pressed by reporters Wednesday, he said, "I trust that the right thing will be done."

The president also pointed to a show of support by a group of scholars, saying: "The important thing I think you should be asking yourselves is why did nearly 900 constitutional experts say that they strongly felt that this matter was not the

subject of impeachment?" Prosecutors from the House Judiciary Committee open their arguments Thursday charging the president committed perjury and obstructed justice to cover up his affair with Lewinsky.

Clinton's lawyers next week will insist the president is innocent of the charges which, even if true, do not rise to the level of impeachable "high crimes and misdemeanors."

"The Senate has an obligation to turn away an unwise and unwarranted misuse of the awesome power of impeachment," the document stated.

The White House also reiterated its warning that a Senate conviction, which requires a two-thirds majority, would threaten national security.

"Removing the president on these facts would substantially alter the delicate constitutional balance and move us closer to a quasi-parliamentary system, in which the president is elected to office by the choice of the people but continues in office only at the pleasure of the Congress," said the brief.

Clinton met with his lawyers Tuesday to sign off on the new

brief, but he appealed Wednesday for a chance to get back to the "problems of the people."

"The important thing for me is to spend as little time thinking about that as possible and as much time working on the issues we're here to discuss as possible," said Clinton, who was meeting with labour leaders.

Polls show most Americans did not support the Dec. 19 House vote to impeach Clinton on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice.

The president alluded to the public's opposition to the process, saying: "I think they would like if it somebody up here would put their [the public's] interests first."

Meanwhile, the House "managers" were putting the final touches on their case issued Monday which insists Clinton "acted in a manner contrary to his trust as president and subversive to the rule of law and constitutional government."

The 13 members of the House Judiciary Committee charges Clinton committed perjury when he denied under oath he had an affair with Lewinsky.

## Top brand-name U.S. firms sued over Pacific island 'sweatshops'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Workers on the Pacific island of Saipan filed class-action suits Wednesday seeking more than \$1 billion from major U.S. clothing designers and retailers accused of using "sweatshops" in the U.S. territory.

The suits accuse Sears, Wal-Mart, The Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Oshkosh B'Gosh and others of a "racketeering conspiracy" by using cheap labour — mostly young women from China, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Thailand — to produce clothing in "intolerable" working conditions.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said in a statement released here they were representing 50,000 workers on Saipan, part of the U.S. territory of the Northern Mariana Islands, in two class action lawsuits filed Wednesday in Saipan and California.

Foreign-owned contractors operating for the U.S. companies are charged with failing to pay overtime and creating intolerable work and living conditions.

Lawyers said the workers were allegedly lured to Saipan with promises of high pay and quality work in the United States.

"Instead they found themselves working up to 12-hour days, seven days a week, often times 'off the clock' without receiving any pay or overtime," the statement said.

The litigation was the first attempt to make U.S. retailers and designers accountable for mistreatment of workers in foreign-owned factories operating on U.S. soil, the lawyers said.

A third lawsuit was filed in California by human rights and labour organisations accusing the companies of trafficking in "hot goods" manufactured in violation of U.S. labour laws.

Together, the three lawsuits are seeking more than \$1 billion in damages and compensation for the workers.

"To allow such squalid conditions to persist on American soil is both patently unlawful and morally reprehensible," said lead attorney Al Meyerhoff.

"Saipan is America's worst sweatshop." The Marianas, a U.S. commonwealth, is exempt from U.S. minimum wage and immigration laws, allowing factories to recruit Asian workers and pay them \$3.05 an hour, well below the U.S. minimum of \$5.15.



## Car thieves target outdoor lovers

MBABANE (R) — Car thieves in Swaziland have found easy targets among couples who drive to remote areas to make love in the open, the Times of Swaziland said in a front-page report Wednesday. Police spokesman Sabelo Dlamini told the newspaper that many of the 585 cars stolen in the tiny mountain kingdom last year were taken while their owners were making love under the sky. "It came to our attention during investigations that some of the stolen vehicles were parked in remote areas, which couples usually visit to make love outdoors. Some, of course, go to commit acts they would rather not be seen doing, like adultery," he said.

## 'Dead' bandit surrenders

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A bandit who the Indian police claimed to have killed some three months ago walked into a court to give himself up, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported. Wednesday, Dhananjay Singh made the dramatic appearance in the northern city of Lucknow. On Tuesday, taking officials completely off guard, the police claimed to have shot Singh dead in October 1998. The authorities have now ordered an investigation into Singh's reported "death."

## Robber falls asleep after meal

CAIRO (AFP) — An Egyptian thief was arrested after treating himself to a filling meal in his victim's kitchen and then falling asleep, police said Wednesday. Tarek Khabalana had finished robbing a Cairo apartment Tuesday and had packed up his loot when he went to the kitchen to eat. The early morning meal Muslims have before a day of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Khabalana ate so well that he fell asleep and was found by the building's owner.

## Cat causes power cut

WARSAW (AFP) — Some 25,000 Warsaw residents were left in the dark after a cat short-circuited a 110 kilovolt electricity transformer station in the Polish capital, electricity company officials said Wednesday. Trams were paralysed for an hour in the incident late Tuesday in the Praga district of the city. Several thefts from shops in the area were reported during the blackout. The cat was killed instantly, a spokesman said.

## Couple divorces after boasts of sex life

CAIRO (AFP) — An Egyptian woman was granted a divorce from her husband because he would not stop boasting to other people about their sex life, court officials said Wednesday. Dosuki Ali Abdul Salam kept telling neighbours and co-workers intimate details about his marriage to 35-year-old Mohammed despite her repeated requests to stop. Mohammed filed for divorce after he struck her in front of neighbours because she asked him not to boast about their bedroom exploits in front of them.

## Smokers booted from ship

MIAMI (R) — Nine passengers have been booted off the luxury liner MS Paradise for smoking cigarettes since Carnival Corp launched the no-smoking vessel a month ago. Carnival officials said on Tuesday. The smoking ban is strictly enforced on the 2,000-passenger ship, which sails from Miami on several cruises through the Caribbean. Before boarding, passengers must sign an agreement acknowledging they will not smoke and be forced to pay for their own way home if they break the rule, the company said.

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Doomsday sect leader arrested

At least 15 rebels killed in Kosovo

Turkish music groups accused of guerrilla links